



# The Doctrinal Test

A Discussion of the Constitutionality of One of  
the Questions Required to be Asked of  
Candidates Seeking Admission to the  
Methodist Episcopal Church

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## INTRODUCTION

THE keenest test of the General Conference which met at Des Moines, as a deliberative assembly, was not the question of unification, nor any other problem of administration that came before it. The severest test it had to meet was the determination, as the Supreme Court of the church, of a question of constitutional law profoundly fundamental to the entire organization of the church for the accomplishment of its work in winning souls from sin to saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The General Conference of 1864 placed in the Ritual form for the admission of probationers into full membership in the church the question, "Do you believe in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church?" The law requires pastors to ask probationers this question, and this makes it a doctrinal test for admission into the church.

This new law was not a conservative act. Till 1864, from the organization of the church in 1784, there had been no doctrinal test for admission into the church. Hence the new law was a very radical uprooting of deeply conserva-

tive principles, operative from the foundation of the church. The General Conference of 1920 may have thought it was conservative in upholding this law. As a matter of fact, it was destructively radical, and the new law was a startling innovation.

The writer, by appeal from the ruling of a bishop, brought the question of the constitutionality of the doctrinal test up for decision by the General Conference, as the Supreme Court of the church.

This great constitutional question caused the most powerful and prolonged debate of the entire session, and the result showed a deep division of opinion, whereas the interests of the church require substantial unanimity on that subject. The debate presents certain facts which should receive from the church the fullest and most careful consideration, for the proper understanding of those facts, and their bearing on the unity of the church in faith and administration of its government, will determine the attitude of the church to principles deeply fundamental in its entire organization and development.

When the General Conference acts as the Supreme Court of the church it is performing its most exalted function, for it is dealing with the foundations of the church. It is therefore evident that it is essential to the life of the

church, that the General Conference shall perform its high functions as a Supreme Court in a manner that shall demonstrate to the church a capacity adequate for the proper discharge of those functions, and thus maintain in the church that generous confidence in the General Conference as a Supreme Court which is essential to the unity of the church.

The situation in the General Conference can very well be understood by comparing it with the procedure of the United States Supreme Court in a famous case, the legal tender decision handed down February 7, 1870, *Hepburn vs. Griswold*. The point in that remarkable case which is instructive to the church, is the very unusual manner of procedure by which the question of the constitutionality of legal tender was finally decided, and the effect of that unusual procedure upon public confidence in the Supreme Court.

In 1870 Salmon P. Chase was chief justice. Abraham Lincoln had appointed him. Lincoln said, "Chase is about one and a half times bigger than any other man I ever knew." Bishop Newman, of whose official board at Metropolitan Church, Washington, Chase was a member, used to delight in telling how, at a sacramental service, he invited penitents to confess, through the holy sacrament, their sins

and believe in Christ. Then the great chief justice came forward and knelt, not at the altar rail, but humbly bowed in lowly reverence at the step of the altar.

While Chase was Lincoln's secretary of the treasury, he, not entirely without misgivings, advocated and defended the constitutionality of the legal tender of United States notes. But when he became chief justice his deep convictions compelled him to reverse himself, and in the *Hepburn vs. Griswold* case he voted with the majority, four to three, that the legal tender was unconstitutional.

But the terrible contest over the impeachment of Andrew Johnson had led Congress to limit the Supreme Court to seven in order to prevent Johnson from appointing any members. After Grant was inaugurated the limit was removed, and he appointed two additional justices, Justice Strong and Justice Bradley, and the court in their decision in the case of *Parker vs. Davis*, handed down January 16, 1872, reversed the former decision, five to four, the chief justice dissenting, and declared the legal tender constitutional.

Though General Grant's high character for spotless integrity, and the fact that he sent the nominations to the Senate the day before the Supreme Court announced its decision, fully

protected his procedure from any well-grounded charge of corruption, it is perfectly clear what the inevitable effect would be upon public confidence in the Supreme Court. Anything which seriously disturbs that confidence is a matter of the gravest concern to the American people.

On Saturday, May 22, after the greatest debate of the session, the General Conference at Des Moines voted, by the very slender majority of fifteen, that the doctrinal test is unconstitutional. But opportunity was later given for absentees to vote, and for members to change their votes, and on Tuesday, May 25, the General Conference reversed itself and decided by a majority of eighty-seven that the doctrinal test is constitutional.

The very slender majority of fifteen, on so gravely important a constitutional question, could not have been satisfactory to the church. But the later vote it is evident will be still less satisfactory.

To see clearly the true significance of the situation, the vote must be attentively considered. The majority of one in the United States Supreme Court of nine was a majority of eleven per cent and a fraction. The majority of eighty-seven in a vote of eight hundred and fifteen is a majority of ten per cent and a fraction. Gravely unsatisfactory as was the pro-

cedure of the United States Supreme Court in the case quoted, the vacillation in the procedure of the General Conference acting as the Supreme Court of the church, its majority for reversal smaller than that of the great national court for reversal, and the great confusion while deciding the method of voting, which caused regretful comment on the floor of the General Conference, all combine to create in thoughtful minds uncomfortable impressions. To give absentees opportunity to vote, and members the right to change their votes, was very kind, very brotherly, and prevented later complaints. But the entire situation is one that cannot be satisfactory to the church, because it is plainly evident there should be substantial unity in the church on such a fundamentally important subject as the normal and proper place and influence of the Articles of Religion in the church, whereas the decision of the General Conference leaves a very large circle of the ablest minds in the church deeply convinced that the decision was not correct.

When the United States Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision on the eighteenth amendment, the whole country received it with deep satisfaction as to the procedure of the court. A unanimous decision in a court of eight hundred and fifty is scarcely to be

expected, but on a gravely important constitutional question only a substantially unanimous opinion could give real satisfaction to the church.

Happily the way to the desired unity of opinion is clear, because there was, in fact, unity of opinion on the most fundamental point, between the opposite sides in the debate. Both sides agreed perfectly that the Articles of Religion are the fixed constitutional standard of doctrine in the church. The validity of such constitutional standard was never in question, because never in any way assailed. With this very solid basis of unity the rest ought to be easy.

There was in the General Conference a fine spirit of loyalty to the truth. All were agreed that the truth should be obeyed. Such a spirit leads directly to the solution of differences of opinion. Again, there was a beautiful spirit of brotherly consideration for the opinion of others, a willingness to hear both sides. This always prepares the way for removing difficulties.

The writer here gladly records his willing tribute of sincere admiration for the brethren of the minority report, and those who agreed with them, though he differs from their opinions entirely. He admires these brethren because they were right on the supreme value of the Articles



of Religion. They were right in guarding the church against weakening the influence of the Articles of Religion in the church. They were right in warning the church against what they sincerely thought would harm it. It is a fact that the church is heavily indebted to, because it has been materially benefited by, men of such firm convictions, high character, and high courage. The path to unity of opinion is easy because it is certain that men of such character will delight in following the truth. It is the truth that must unite the church.

The first step toward this holy unity on the Articles of Religion must be clearly, very clearly, understood. The first step is decidedly not the question of constitutionality. The constitutionality of the doctrinal test is a very important question, but it is really subsidiary to another greater one; it is, in fact, a by-product of this greater one. The great question before the church, one that precedes that of constitutionality and explains it, one that is absolutely fundamental to the entire spiritual work of the church is, What is the normal place of the Articles of Religion in the spiritual work of the church, and how do they normally exercise their true and powerful influence in that spiritual work, and produce their normal and true results in the conversion of souls, the growth of the

church in numbers, and the development of its vast world work?

When the church clearly understands this, the question of the constitutionality of the doctrinal test will fall automatically into its proper place. But it has not been understood. It was thought in the General Conference that dropping the doctrinal test would paralyze the Articles of Religion in their true influence upon the spiritual work of the church, and bring great disaster. But when it is understood that the validity of the Articles of Religion and their influence upon the spiritual work of the church are entirely independent of the doctrinal test, and in no way influenced either by its presence or absence, the uneasiness about possible danger to the church vanishes, and the doctrinal test can be disposed of calmly in the clear light of the truth.

The first subject to be considered, therefore, is not the constitutionality of the doctrinal test. That will be treated in its proper place. The first subject that should be most carefully studied is the true function of the Articles of Religion in the church. The writer would, with the deepest solicitude, urge the reader to study this subject with the most painstaking care, for it has not been understood, and yet it determines every question concerning the Articles of Religion, and especially the doctrinal test.

The writer here records his indebtedness to his classmate, Dr. John Alfred Faulkner, professor of church history in Drew Theological Seminary, for valuable assistance in securing statistics, and information concerning the doctrinal test in other churches.

## COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY REPORT NO. 6

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TITLE: MATTER OF APPEAL OF W. H. SHIPMAN  
OF DES MOINES CONFERENCE

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Adopted May 12, 1920. Members of  
Committee, 19; number present, 19; for, 14;  
against, 5.

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### *(a) Majority Report*

The Judiciary Committee has had referred to it an Appeal of W. H. Shipman of the Des Moines Conference from a ruling of the presiding bishop. The bishop was requested to rule on the constitutionality of the question required to be asked of candidates for admission into church membership which reads as follows: "Do you believe in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church?" and which must be answered "I do" (Discipline, 1916, p. 397). The bishop did not rule that the legislation thus challenged was either constitutional or unconstitutional, although we think it was his duty to have done so. He contented himself by ruling

that pending any decision as to the constitutionality of the matter objected to every pastor is under legal obligation to ask each candidate for full membership the question objected to. The purpose of the appellant was plainly to secure a decision from which an appeal might be taken and the question of constitutionality determined. The appellant's right to raise the constitutional question is one of which he cannot be deprived by the failure of a bishop to rule directly upon it. As the bishop did not decide the legislation to be unconstitutional, we must treat his decision as holding for the purpose of the Appeal that it was constitutional.

The question then is presented as to the constitutionality of the provision found in paragraph 514 of the Discipline of 1916, which is entitled "Form for Receiving Persons into the Church from Preparatory Membership."

The objection made is that the General Conference has by the language in paragraph 514 already quoted, prescribed a doctrinal test for admission into membership in the church, and that in doing so it has exceeded its constitutional powers. The legislation thus challenged was enacted by the General Conference of 1864. (See Journal, May 12, 1864.)

It is unnecessary to say that, under the constitution of the church, the powers of a

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General Conference are not unlimited. It is also unnecessary to say that every General Conference is under solemn obligation scrupulously to regard the constitutional limitations imposed upon its powers. The constitution being the supreme law, any legislation contrary thereto is void.

The General Rules were written by John Wesley, assisted by his brother Charles, in 1743. The Articles of Religion, except the Twenty-third, were prepared by John Wesley from the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England in 1784. Both became the standards of our church after its organization at the Christmas Conference of 1784. The Articles of Religion established no test of church membership. The General Rules established none except the "one condition" hereinafter referred to. Prior to 1812 the General Conference exercised full legislative power over the church. In 1808 the General Conference made provision for a delegated General Conference to assemble in 1812 and declared that that General Conference and all its successors should exercise the legislative power of the church subject to the six Restrictive Rules, which therefore became constitutional in their character and have remained in force from that time to this, and, of course, were in force in 1864 when the legislation now

challenged was enacted. The Restrictive Rules provide that "The General Conference shall not revoke nor change the General Rules of our church" (paragraph 46, section 4). The General Rules and the Articles of Religion were specifically adopted into the constitution in 1901, but this adoption of them in the constitution did not add to the constitutional force which they at that time had. The General Conference cannot directly nor indirectly alter the General Rules, nor by statutory legislation destroy their meaning and force.

The General Rules which the General Conference cannot change read in 1864 as they read now as follows: "There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies—'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins'" (Discipline, 1916, paragraph 29, p. 35). So that the question, in the last analysis, is whether the General Conference has changed "the only one condition" of membership specified in the General Rules which is "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins," by adding another condition when it required the ministers to ask of the candidate for admission "Do you believe in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal church?" and re-

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quiring the answer, "I do." We have no doubt that by this legislation the General Conference has added to the one condition of membership as specified in the General Rules, a second condition, which is a belief in the Articles of Religion. This committee is therefore of the opinion that in adopting this legislation herein complained of, the General Conference has changed the General Rules, that it was without power to do so, and that its action in doing so is a nullity.

It is, of course, immaterial that in taking the action it did, the General Conference did not put it in the form of an amendment of paragraph 29 of the General Rules but saw fit to put it in the Ritual. Though in the Ritual, the effect in a legal and technical sense constituted as truly an additional test or condition of membership as though the General Conference had written it into paragraph 29 of the General Rules. The addition was equally in excess of the powers of the General Conference whether made to the General Rules directly or indirectly or through a provision in the Ritual. To decide otherwise would be to destroy constitutional limitations or make them meaningless.

It goes without saying that the General Conference of 1864 in enacting the legislation now challenged had no intention of exceeding its



powers. In exceeding its powers it did so through inadvertence due to the haste which attends necessarily upon legislation in a body like the General Conference. The objection of the unconstitutionality is one entitled to the most careful consideration, and such consideration we have given it.

It is a rule based on principle and supported by the great weight of authority in this country that if the meaning of a constitutional provision is clear, the courts cannot resort to extrinsic matters to determine its meaning. Such matters certainly cannot be used to contradict the plain meaning of the words used in the instrument. If, however, the meaning is doubtful, courts do look beyond the instrument into public writings, the literature of the period, the history of the times, and into conditions then existing to aid them in discovering the real intent and the true meaning of the provision being construed. It is, however, not improper for us to remind the Conference that no doctrinal test for church membership was laid down by John Wesley or by the founders of our church. "One circumstance," wrote John Wesley, "is quite peculiar to the people called Methodists; that is the terms upon which any person may be admitted to their society—they do not impose in order to their admission any opinion whatever. . . One

condition, and one only is required—a real desire to save their souls. Where this is, it is enough; they desire no more; they lay stress upon nothing else; they ask only ‘Is thy heart herein as my heart? If so give me thy hand.’ ” Then he asks where is there such another society in the habitable world, and adds: “I know none. Let any man show me if he can.” Again he says: “There is no other religious society under heaven which requires nothing of men, in order to their admission into it, but a desire to save their souls. Look around you; you cannot be admitted into the church or society of Quakers, the Presbyterians, Anabaptists, or any others, unless you hold the same opinions with them, and adhere to the same mode of worship. The Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion. Now I do not know any other religious society, either ancient or modern, wherein such liberty of conscience is allowed, or has been allowed since the age of the apostles. Herein is our glorying and a glorying peculiar to us. What society shares it with us?” (See Abel Stevens’s *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. II, pp. 216 and 217.)

A careful examination shows that no doctrinal test of membership was established until the General Conference of 1864 enacted the legisla-

tion now under review. A provision was inserted in the Discipline of 1840, which declared that none were to be received into the church until they had been examined by the minister in charge and had given a satisfactory assurance "both as to the correctness of their faith, and their willingness to observe and keep the rules of the church." That provision did not undertake to prescribe what should be regarded as "satisfactory assurances" and did not define in what "the correctness of their faith" should consist. The provision was regarded as simply administrative in its nature, and it was left to the discretion of the individual pastor, if he were not satisfied, to give to the candidate further religious instruction and receive from him further assurances. In his *History of Methodism* Abel Stevens, a distinguished authority, commenting upon the provision enacted in 1840 above recited, states that "If the rule amounts to more than this, it would probably be pronounced by good judges of Methodist law incompatible with the usages and general system of Methodism, an oversight of the General Conference which enacted it, and contrary to the General Rules as guarded by the Restrictive Rules" (Stevens's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. II, p. 218, note 11). If this be so as to the legislation of 1840, a portion

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of the legislation of 1864 now under consideration is unconstitutional and void.

We think it clearly appears from what has been said that the author of the General Rules, John Wesley, intended that no doctrinal test should be established for admission into the Methodist Societies. It is equally clear that the founders of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 in accepting the General Rules must have accepted them with a like intent all the more clearly evidenced by the historic fact that for eighty years thereafter no attempt was made to establish a doctrinal test and to create a second condition of membership in the place of the one condition laid down in the General Rules and which it was provided in the constitution of 1808 that no General Conference should have the power to change. It seems to the majority of this committee perfectly plain what the intention was as respects the question now under consideration.

In conclusion we beg to remind the General Conference that the question submitted to the Judiciary Committee is one of law and nothing else. It is beyond our province, as it is beyond the province of the General Conference itself in deciding this matter, that we should be concerned with the wisdom of the constitutional restriction imposed, or with the wisdom or the

expediency of the legislation enacted in 1864. There is but one question now to be decided and that is the question of power. That, and that alone, is now before us. In deciding that question we have reached the following conclusions:

1. The minister in receiving members into the church is under no obligation to use a form which is unconstitutional.

2. The constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church established no doctrinal tests for church membership.

3. The only condition of membership which it contains is that found in the General Rules and it is protected from change by General Conference action by the fourth Restrictive Rule.

4. The General Conference of 1864 had no power to establish the condition of membership contained in the form for admission of members, and it is therefore unconstitutional.

5. The ruling of the bishop in this case was therefore in error and the Appeal is sustained.

HENRY WADE ROGERS, *Chairman*.

OSCAR A. KNEHANS, *Secretary*.

For concurrence: Henry Wade Rogers, Chairman; J. I. Bartholomew, Samuel C. Brown, Frank M. Clevenger, Henry C. Conrad, Earl R. Conder, F. G. B. Kemp, Oscar A. Knehans, John Marshall, William Nottingham, Charles A. Pollock, H. R. Snavely, Frank B. Smith,

*(b) Opinion of J. C. Nate*

One member of the committee, Joseph C. Nate, concurs in the opinion of the majority as to the issue of constitutionality but with certain qualifications as follows:

The question before the Judiciary Committee is one raised by the appeal of W. H. Shipman of the Des Moines Conference, and is upon the constitutionality of the interrogation made of persons being received into full membership in the church, as found in the Ritual (Discipline, 1916, paragraph 514, question 3), to-wit: "Do you believe in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church?" The contention of appellant is that the formulation of this question to be used in the connection stated transcended the powers of the General Conference of 1864 which adopted the Ritual form in question. Such contention is based upon the first and fourth Restrictive Rules of the constitution of the church (Discipline, 1916, paragraph 46, sections 1 and 4), as follows (section 1): "The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, nor change our Articles of Religion, nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine"; and (section 4): "The

General Conference shall not revoke nor change the General Rules of our church.” These restrictions are taken, in the reasoning of appellant, in conjunction with the provision of the General Rules which states (Discipline, 1916, paragraph 29): “There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies—‘a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.’ ”

It is the further statement of the appellant before your committee that he was originally led to submit his appeal especially by a revulsion of feeling against submitting the ritualistic interrogation under consideration to persons being received into the church in their earlier youth, and he asks your committee to find, in effect: (1) That the constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church establishes no doctrinal tests for church membership; (2) That the only conditions of membership are those found in the General Rules, which are protected from change by the General Conference by the fourth Restrictive Rule; (3) That the General Conference of 1864 had no power to establish the condition of membership contained in the ritual form here in question, and that, therefore, (4) the minister in receiving members is under no obligation to use that form.

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While it is to be adjudged that a strictly technical finding upon the question thus brought before us will fully sustain the Appeal, it is submitted as a further judgment that such a finding ought to be reported for the approval of the General Conference of the church only in the light of several factors proper to be considered in connection with such decision. Among such factors are:

(1) It reasonably appears that the General Conference of 1864 made its Ritual forms in the constitution and Articles of Religion as a whole. And while it is true that the Conference was restricted in its power thus to do by the provisions of the constitution itself, it equally appears that no violence is done by the Ritual form in question to the content and purposes of the constitution and Articles of Religion taken in their entirety.

(2) We believe, further, that consideration is to be given to the fact that the interrogation in question as to its constitutionality was placed among the Ritual forms of the Discipline of 1864, and has since continued in the ritualistic portion of the Discipline of the church. In the Ritual the various paragraphs, forms, and parts are not so much a determination or adjudication of the substance of doctrine of the several sacraments and administrations included as they are



a pledge of loyalty to and due observance of such doctrines as elsewhere and otherwise determined.

(3) It is quite beyond the province of civil courts to suggest, in analogous cases, any further bearings or implications flowing from a release of obligation afforded to an individual asserting his personal and independent rights and privileges. But we think it to be not beyond the province of a committee charged with the duty of adjudicating the issues arising in all the churches of its denomination to note the possible danger of overemphasis of the present decision as to its scope and implications. The important Ritual form here in question has been in general and accepted use for more than half a century, and by virtue of such long and accepted use has fair claim to being an established standard of custom if not of law. And while the appellant is duly justified in not asking the Ritual interrogation as to belief in our doctrines as a condition of membership in our church, a judicial decision upon his conscientious difficulty may not improperly be considered in its relation to the decades of growth and spiritual victory of the church under common and accepted use of the form; to the fact of the successful adaptation of the form by scores and hundreds of pastors to the conditions of receiving younger

persons into the church, or those for any reason not supposedly largely informed as to our doctrines; and even to the broad fact that while Mr. Wesley did not insist upon the stated requirement for membership, he was nevertheless steadfast in the position that scrupulous respect for the body of its essential doctrines is vital in the welfare of the church.

It is therefore concluded that the Appeal before your committee should be sustained, but that the question to which objection is raised should be noted as doing no violence to the Constitution of the church, including the Articles of Religion, as a whole; as not improperly to be regarded in its ritualistic rather than in its strictly legal relations; and as deserving the due consideration of its place and worth ensuing from the many years of its acceptable use in the church.

JOSEPH C. NATE.

(c) *Minority Report*

The minority of the Judiciary Committee having under consideration the Appeal of W. H. Shipman, dissents from the majority report for reasons herewith submitted:

The question brought before the General Conference by this Appeal is not whether it is advisable by legislation to alter the Ritual with respect to the questions to be asked candidates

for full membership. The real question is whether it is unconstitutional to examine them as to their belief in the Holy Scriptures. Paragraph 29, in the General Rules, on which the majority opinion rests its contention of unconstitutionality, relates, in the opinion of the minority, to seekers of preparatory membership, and not to those seeking full membership.

It is also contended by the minority that it has always been the practice of our church to require of applicants for full membership satisfactory evidence of their belief in the Holy Scriptures.

#### HISTORICAL ARGUMENT

Methodism was born, not as a church but as a movement. Many of its adherents were already members of churches and so continued. This is why no formal creed was proposed for many years, and no sacraments administered. Wesley was determined not to break with the Church of England if he could avoid it.

The first actual break came when the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1784, as a result of the Revolutionary War. Up to that time the sacraments had not been administered among the American Methodists, but they had received them in the Episcopal

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Churches. (See Methodist Constitutions and Charters, pp. 3-7.) As to the extent of this break with the past (see *Ibid.*, p. 11) it says, "This being the beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church, it will be necessary to take particular notice of those regulations or rules which were formed at that time, especially such as had not previously been practiced by us."

In the Minutes of the Conference which organized the church it is recorded (*Ibid.*, p. 12), "We will form ourselves into an Episcopal Church under the direction of superintendents, elders, deacons, and helpers, according to terms of ordination annexed to our Liturgy and the form of Discipline set forth in these Minutes."

William Watters, our first American itinerant, and also one of the organizers of the church, in a letter (*Ibid.*, p. 13) says: "On the 25th of December, 1784, our Conference met in Baltimore, to consider the plan of church government which was recommended by Mr. Wesley. It was adopted and unanimously agreed to with great satisfaction, and we became, instead of a religious society, a separate church, under the name of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

Again from William Watters (*Ibid.*, p. 15): "The Methodists in England and America formerly did not call themselves a particular

church, but a religious society in connection with different churches, but mostly with the Episcopal Church.”

These quotations are given to show that the practices of Wesley's societies in England, or even in America, have very little weight as proof of what the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted as its policy. It had hitherto been a simply organized religious association, without creed or liturgy. It now became a church with both, for Wesley at that time had sent over not only the Articles of Religion, but also a well-developed Ritual. (See Bishop Cooke's History of the Ritual.)

Hence it is not necessary to go back of this date to find the meaning given to the clause in the General Rules as to receiving new members.

However, Porter, in his *Compendium of Methodism* (p. 30), shows that as early as 1738 Wesley had established a probationary period of two months for all received into his societies, and that they had to satisfy the whole congregation of their fitness before they could be received into full fellowship. He quotes the full plan of the organization of the societies. The General Rules were not given until five years later, hence it is clear that the practice did not grow out of the Rules, but the Rules out of the

practice. This is an important point to remember (Porter, p. 37).

Wesley often claimed that he patterned his societies after the primitive church, in which the system of receiving and training new believers as catechumens, before receiving them into full fellowship was general. "The condition required for the enrollment as a catechumen was the same as that required by the General Rules of our church—for Wesley ever had the practice of the primitive church before him—'A desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from their sins' " (Cooke's *History of the Ritual*, p. 224).

Also, both Wesley and his followers were familiar with the practice of the Church of England in putting its children into catechism classes before giving them confirmation as members of the church. There can be no reasonable doubt, from these and many other facts which could be cited, that the rule of the "One condition for entrance into these societies," refers to the entrance upon trial, as above described, and not to final acceptance as full members. The important fact in this discussion, however, is not the practice of Wesley in England, but of the Methodists in America after they organized the Methodist Episcopal Church.

That it has been the practice of the church

from that time to regard the Rule stated in paragraph 29 as applying only to probationary membership, we think can be abundantly proven, and that the proof is fatal to the contention of the majority report.

The probationary system came into our church along with the General Rules. In 1789 the period of probation was extended from two to six months (Porter, p. 443). Speaking of this system, he says: "If after this term of probation they have been baptized, and on examination it appears that they are Methodists in faith and are disposed to observe the rules of the church, they are admitted to full membership. In being received on trial they profess 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come.' They do not say they are Methodists and believe our doctrines and Discipline. . . . But having been received into full connection, they stand in quite a different relation. They now profess to believe both our doctrine and discipline and are governed by them."

He says again (p. 446): "Till 1840 our Discipline contained no exception to the Rule requiring a probation. Persons coming to us from other denominations, however intelligent and pious, had to join on trial and graduate in due form."

Again (p. 445), he says: "No specific form of

receiving probationers into full connection has been maintained among us, further than to examine them before the church as to their faith and willingness to observe our rules. This has now (1864) been provided for in our Ritual," etc.

Also Henry Wheeler, in his great work, *The History and Exposition of the XXV Articles*, says on this point (p. 10): "Prior to 1864 candidates for full membership were examined by the pastor, and were required to give satisfactory assurances both of the correctness of their faith and their willingness to observe and keep the Rules of the church. The method of the examination was discretionary with the pastor, and the declaration of faith was general rather than specific."

Both these authorities show that the religious test for full membership did not begin with the Ritual established in 1864, of which complaint is made in the Appeal under consideration, but was a long-established custom, dating from the organization of our church.

Mr. Wheeler, in his *One Thousand Questions and Answers, on Methodist history and polity*, says of the General Rules (p. 82): "What are the General Rules? A concise statement for the regulation of Christian life and deportment, so general as to be applicable to all Methodist so-



cieties." There is no hint in his discussion of the Rules that the church ever considered the one in paragraph 29 to have the authoritative position given it in the majority report, or any desire that it should be so construed. Even the quotations from Abel Stevens's History of Methodism, so much relied on in that report, do not state that the Rule in paragraph 29 was made the standard of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the reception of members into full connection. Yet that use of the Rule is the only one which would give ground for the contention of the report as to the unconstitutionality of the use of the Ritual in paragraph 514.

Bishop Merrill, in his Digest of Methodist Law, is very explicit in his statement on this point. On page 44 he says: "The second class of applicants for probation in the church may be regarded as seekers or inquirers. The conditions on which they are to be received are few and simple." There is only condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies—a "desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." This is the only condition "previously" required, and refers exclusively to admission on trial.

The minority believe that these historic quotations abundantly show that the church never meant the provisions of the Rules in

paragraph 29 to stand as the "One condition" of reception into full membership, but only of admission into preparatory membership. Long before 1840 the Discipline contained the admonition: "Let none be received into the church until they are recommended by a leader with whom they have met at least six months on trial, and have been baptized, and shall, on examination by the minister of the charge, before the church, give satisfactory assurance both of the correctness of their faith and their willingness to observe and keep the rules of the church."

It will be seen by this quotation, that the contention of the majority report would apply just as much to the custom and Ritual of administering baptism before receiving members into full connection as to the Ritual of which complaint is made. It contains requirements of confession of faith in the Apostles' Creed, which would be also unconstitutional, if the contention of the majority report is well founded.

The far-reaching effect, disastrous to the highest degree to the spiritual power of the church, if the contention of the majority report is upheld, must be apparent to all.

It would make of our Articles of Religion merely a set of recommended doctrines with no authority over the faith of the people, and any

person, no matter whether he were Jew, Moham-medan, or pagan, could claim membership in the church with impunity.

Surely, with all the historic proof of the jealousy with which Methodism has been guarded as to its doctrinal beliefs from the days of Wesley to the present, it cannot be that the church ever meant to open its doors so un-guardedly as the contention of the majority report claims.

#### LEGAL ASPECT

The "Articles of Religion" are as much a part of the constitution as the General Rules. The constitution must be interpreted as a whole and in accordance with its spirit and intent. Each part should, if possible, be given an interpretation consistent with the rest. In paragraph 5 of the constitution it is declared:

"The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Therefore, by the constitution whatever is read in the Scriptures or may be proved thereby is required to be believed and is necessary to salvation.

We think it cannot be reasonably argued that

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it is unconstitutional to require one who seeks full membership to give evidence of his assent to that which is in the constitution. One seeking the privilege of full membership cannot claim the rights without assenting to the requirements of the basic compact of the church he asks to enter.

Paragraph 29, when read in its entirety and in connection with paragraphs 30 to 32 following, shows that it is founded on, and the "desire" therein required can exist only by reason of a belief in the Scriptures, which though it may be feeble at first, is expected to grow and bring forth fruits. By paragraph 33 these rules "we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word which is the only rule both of our faith and practice." By necessary implication and by express statement belief in the written Word is made necessary.

The legal presumption is that paragraph 514 and each part of it is constitutional. It cannot be held to be unconstitutional unless clearly shown to be so. If the question to be asked concerning belief in the Scriptures is unconstitutional, then the question whether the candidate renews his baptismal covenant is also unconstitutional.

The purpose of interpretation is to find out what was intended. Unreasonable results weigh

strongly against an interpretation that will produce them.

The minority believes that paragraph 514 is constitutional.

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# I

## DISCUSSION BY WILLIAM H. SHIPMAN

### HOW THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION FUNCTION

JOHN WESLEY lived in an age, and performed his lifework in the midst, of a constant and often tempestuous battle of doctrinal controversy. Much of his time was spent in writing and preaching on doctrinal themes which were the center of great controversy. Wesley's greatest coadjutor, John Fletcher, crystallized the lifework of his rare mind into a single publication, his Checks to Antinomianism, for many years a part of the Conference course of study. In that age the great debate on Calvinism was at its highest point of powerful and often heated controversy.

Wesley, therefore, perceived that it was in the highest degree necessary that the church should define clearly its attitude on the fundamentals of the Christian faith, as a standard of doctrine for the guidance of the church. He, accordingly, prepared, from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, the Articles of Religion, except the twenty-third, and they are now a part of the constitution of the church, regularly

adopted as such by due constitutional process in 1901.

His powerfully intuitive genius for constructive ecclesiastical statesmanship perceived, with flawless accuracy, exactly where the Articles of Religion could effectively function as guide to the church in sound doctrine, and as a protection to the church against false doctrine. He perceived also where the Articles of Religion could not function, and would be useless, as a guide to the church in sound doctrine, or as a protection against false doctrine. Wesley perceived that the Articles of Religion would function normally and powerfully through the teaching power of the church, and he devoted the full strength of his incomparable genius to organize and direct the teaching power of the church to that end. He perceived that it was impossible for the Articles of Religion to function effectively for the instruction and protection of the church as a doctrinal test for admission into the church, and therefore he utterly and peremptorily rejected them as such doctrinal test, because it was a perversion of their proper and normal function in the church.

Wesley's genius probably reached its most exalted level in functioning the Articles of Religion through the teaching power of the church.

First, he used the pulpit. There he himself covered the entire ground of Christian doctrinal teaching, and his sermons are now the constitutional standard of doctrine in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He held all his preachers firmly and steadfastly to his own standards, and wrote the American church a letter dated October 3, 1783, which was presented to the Conference held at Baltimore May 20, 1784.

He exhorted the preachers "all to be determined to abide by the Methodist doctrines and discipline published in the four volumes of sermons, and the notes on the New Testament, together with the Large Minutes of Conference." He further said, "Undoubtedly, the greatest danger to the work of God in America is alike to arise from such as will arise among yourselves speaking perverse things or bringing among you new doctrines, particularly Calvinism. You should guard against this with all possible care, for it is easier to keep them out than to thrust them out" (Stevens's History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. II, p. 132).

The General Conference has unlimited authority to establish standards for admission into the ministry, and every candidate for reception into full connection after his two years on trial, is asked the following questions:



Have you studied the doctrines of the Methodist Episcopal Church?

After full examination do you believe that our doctrines are in harmony with the Holy Scriptures?

Will you preach and maintain them?

Wesley perceived that of necessity the church must define the doctrines it will teach, and by the same necessity it must choose men who will preach them in truth from the heart. The church cannot be true to itself, true to its Head, and true to the world, unless it puts into its pulpit men who will be true to the doctrines it pledges itself to teach. Hence every minister received into full connection in an Annual Conference solemnly pledges himself to preach and maintain the Articles of Religion. This stringent doctrinal test for admission into the ministry is constitutional.

Second, Wesley's next statesmanlike move was to establish his school at Kingswood. He perceived, with that profound instinct for teaching and government which always guided him, that the Articles of Religion could and must function through the educational system of the church by training leaders for the church deeply imbued with the Articles of Religion, and vital with the personal religious experience developed by their doctrines. The result of this far-seeing

move of Wesley is our great system of academies, colleges, universities, and theological schools, for which the Educational Jubilee recently raised \$35,000,000. In the teaching of these schools the Articles of Religion are steadily and powerfully functioning at their highest and best. In them, though the sectarian spirit is absent, nothing untrue to the Articles of Religion has any right to be taught. From them is pouring forth every year a noble and steadily increasing host of highly trained minds, and finest Christian characters, all molded in the spirit of the Articles of Religion. This trained host goes forth to reenforce the constantly thinning ranks of the episcopacy, the other high offices of the church, and steadily to fill the ranks of the pastorate and strengthen the pulpit.

Third, Wesley's powerful genius readily grasped the momentous fact that the Articles of Religion could and must function through the press. Few men in the history of the world have written and printed as much as John Wesley. He poured forth from the press a prodigious volume of literature all tuned to the key of the Articles of Religion, and vibrant with the spirit and meaning of those Articles. He set his ministers the task of spreading that literature, and he communicated the powerful impulse of his work to American Methodism. From the

original itinerant with a package of books in his saddlebags it developed into our great Book Concern, the largest religious publishing house in the world, pouring out a Niagara of literature into our churches, our Sunday schools, our homes, and abroad in the world. The whole stupendous organization, with its vast world-wide results, is the product of Wesley's consummate genius for making the Articles of Religion powerful and vital through the press. An element of the most conspicuous significance, and of world-wide influence in the press, is our great circle of Advocates penetrating everywhere on this planet. At the head of each Advocate is an editor under the most solemn obligations to make the Articles of Religion effective through his paper, and interpret to the church all its life and work, and the life and work of the whole world in the spirit and meaning of the Articles of Religion. The same is true of our vast Sunday school literature, where the influence of the Articles of Religion cannot be measured.

Fourth, Wesley's genius perceived that the Articles of Religion could and must function, and with profoundest spiritual significance, in the hymnology of the church.

It is difficult to write here with moderation. For here Wesley acted as one upon whom the inspiration of the Almighty acted with moving

power. He and his brother Charles placed in the hands of the church a hymnology, much of it written by themselves, in which the Articles of Religion voiced themselves in poetry of the purest and loftiest type, linked with music that thrilled deep into the heart's tenderest experiences. Poetry and music are the two choicest vehicles of expression. Through them the human mind and heart express their highest, their deepest, their most refined, and their tenderest sentiments. Here faith, hope, love, purity, utter the deep meaning of the Articles of Religion in terms that move poor human nature to its most sacred depths, and to its most exalted action. No church can be misled by false doctrine while it sings from the heart, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and "Rock of Ages." The most vital significance and the inmost heart of the Articles of Religion are in those two hymns, luminous as the brightness at the tomb of our risen Lord.

It is plain why Wesley rejected the doctrinal test for admission into the church. He clearly perceived that to force upon a candidate who has not studied them like a ministerial candidate, a dry collection of theological dogma, is as useless as dropping a handful of good seed upon a pile of dry sand. He perceived that the Articles of Religion could not act with vital

power till they were interpreted to the church in terms of life and character, vibrant and pulsing with the life and character of the interpreter. Wisely, therefore, he rejected the doctrinal test and used the pulpit, the educational system, the press, the hymnology of the church to teach the true meaning of the Articles of Religion, and make them a power in the spiritual life and work of the church.

But still further, John Wesley well knew that the Articles of Religion would function powerfully in the ministrations of a faithful pastor. This is easily illustrated.

The writer was once called to minister at a hospital to a brakeman who had fallen under the car and been crushed. When the writer reached him he lay on the operating table, a white cloth over him heavily blotched with crimson stains, a great crimson pool under the table, a surgeon at his side injecting a saline solution into his arm. He lifted his dying eyes and said, "I want you to pray God to forgive my sins." The surgeons and nurses reverently bowed their heads. No person in that solemn group was thinking of the Articles of Religion. But I dare not pray in the immediate presence of death to a Christ who was only man; I must then pray to a Christ who said, "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins," and, "All power

is given unto me in heaven and in earth." I must pray to the Christ who is defined in the second Article of Religion as "very God and very man," who as God had power to forgive sin, and as man wept by the grave in tender sympathy with human grief. I prayed to this Christ to forgive the sins of the dying penitent and receive him to his heavenly home.

After the prayer a surgeon stepped up and felt the poor boy's pulse, dropped his head, shook it sadly, turned to the boy and said, "Are there any messages you wish to send to your friends?" He said, "Tell mother I am sorry I made her so much trouble; tell father I wish I had been a better boy; tell sweetheart that I loved her." Then the failing lips were silent, and in less than five minutes he was dead. Yes, dead, and thank God, in the immediate presence of death, the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church had functioned in their most powerful, their highest, and their holiest form. They had so functioned, and nobody present at that thrilling scene ever thought of them, least of all myself, who, in every thought and word and movement, was guided by them.

It is an error of the gravest character to attribute the success of the church, or the purity of its doctrine, to the doctrinal test for admission

into its membership. The church owes absolutely nothing to the doctrinal test. It has been inert from the hour it was enacted, will always be inert, and an empty form in what should be a service of the most sacred significance. It is a heavy burden alike upon the intelligence, the heart, and the conscience of many faithful pastors whom the law compels to use it, and upon the conscience of many thoughtful Christians, who have the seal of the Holy Spirit on their hearts and his witness to their acceptance with Christ, but whom the law forces to give a formal assent to an unchristian requirement.

The writer writhed under this law for many years till he heard the Master's voice calling, "What is that to thee? follow thou me." Instantly he forsook the law, never asked the question again, followed the Good Shepherd, and led his flock to know the Good Shepherd's voice when he says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Then came deep down in his heart the consciousness that in the holiest sense he had reached the unity of a Methodist preacher's pastorate: he was true to the deepest meaning of the Articles of Religion, he was obedient to the Master's command, he was in harmony with

the great father and founder of Methodism, and he was carrying out in perfect loyalty the teaching and principles that had given the Methodist Episcopal Church its success and protected it from the disintegrating and destructive influences of unsound doctrine.

Let it again be stated therefore, with utmost definiteness, that the Articles of Religion take their normal place in the church, and exercise their powerful influence in the spiritual work of the church, not through the doctrinal test, but through the teaching power of the church, in its pulpit, in its educational system, in its press, in its hymnology, and in the ministrations of its pastors. It should be clearly perceived that the normal, powerful, and highly productive functioning of the Articles of Religion is entirely independent of the doctrinal test, neither the presence nor absence of which can have any influence upon that normal working of the Articles of Religion in the teaching power of the church.

This will be better seen if another pregnant fact be carefully considered, a fact which, evidently, those who supported the doctrinal test have overlooked. They were right in thinking the Articles of Religion were necessary to the life of the church, but they have failed to discern why that is so; they failed to perceive the true



relation of the Articles of Religion to the spiritual life of the church.

It should be most carefully noted that the Articles of Religion are fundamental to the spiritual life of the church because some of them contain the doctrines of salvation, as they were taught by Christ and his apostles. Those who supported the doctrinal test seemed to have thought that dropping the doctrinal test meant dropping the doctrines of salvation as a test. This is a peculiar error, and must be clearly understood. If the Articles of Religion contained only the doctrines of salvation, it would be constitutional and right to make them a doctrinal test, for salvation is the Master's test.

It is also the "one condition previously required" in the constitution of the church, where the doctrines of salvation are not mentioned but are implicit, giving it its significance, and where this significance is carefully and minutely expounded by requiring the applicant to do no harm, to do good, to observe the "ordinances of God," that is, public worship of God, the ministry of the Word either read or expounded, the Supper of the Lord, family and private prayer, searching the Scriptures, fasting or abstinence. If one studies the General Rules carefully he will perceive the "one condition previously required" covers a very broad ground, for they carry out

the Master's tests, "Ye must be born again," and "By their fruits ye shall know them," that is, a pure heart and a holy life. The Master's tests are so comprehensive they reach to the heart's deepest life and to the farthest circumference of daily action. The doctrines of salvation and baptism are not mentioned in the General Rules because it was not necessary. They are implicit in the test, "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and be saved from their sins," an expression that is meaningless except as interpreted by the Master's teaching on salvation and baptism.

But in addition to the doctrines of salvation the Articles of Religion contain definitions of subjects which are not necessary to salvation, and which, for that reason, are improper to be used as a test for admission into the church.

Is it not plainly absurd to make a test for admission into the church of a series of definitions on purgatory, speaking in an unknown tongue, sacrament in both kinds, the marriage of ministers, rites and ceremonies, Christian men's goods, a Christian man's oath?

Does not sound judgment dictate that our people, after they have satisfied the church of their valid acceptance of the doctrines of salvation, should be left to exercise Christian freedom in forming their judgment on other subjects?

But those unessential subjects are by the doctrinal test placed on an equality with the doctrines of salvation. This is a grave error. Dropping the doctrinal test corrects this error, but does not drop the doctrines of salvation, for, as stated, they are implicit in the "one condition previously required" by the constitution. Dropping the doctrinal test does not drop the Articles of Religion, for they remain in the constitution as the fixed standard of the doctrinal teaching of the church.

Everything in the Articles of Religion that sustains the spiritual life and power of the church is in "the one condition previously required" of the constitution.

#### FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

WHEN John Wesley rejected the doctrinal test for admission into his societies was he untrue to the Articles of Religion which he had himself prepared?

Here appears the gravest misunderstanding of the General Conference. Here its lack of adequate information is very apparent. This misunderstanding was not in misconstruing the constitution, serious as that error was. There is no sign anywhere in the great debate that in sustaining the doctrinal test the General Conference had the faintest consciousness that it was

tearing up by the roots two supreme objects Wesley had in view, and which reach far down into the profoundest depths of Methodist fundamental principles.

Here Wesley's ecclesiastical statesmanship appears again in its noblest aspect. In rejecting the doctrinal test for admission into his societies it is luminously clear that Wesley had a twofold object.

First, it was his purpose to hold the church steadfastly true to the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme Head of the church.

Second, it was his purpose to hold the church steadfastly true to the fundamental principle of the great Reformation.

These two objects he accomplished by rejecting the doctrinal test, and these two objects the General Conference entirely overlooked by sustaining the doctrinal test.

First, then, the example and teaching of the Master. The Lord Jesus never used the doctrinal test; there is not a trace of it in his teaching or practice. Jesus had only two tests for admission into his church, "Ye must be born again," and, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Jesus's tests for admission into his church were a Christian experience and a Christian character, that is, a clean heart

and a holy life. And John Wesley wrought those two tests of the Master into the General Rules, and he put nothing else there, for he well knew that as a pure heart and a holy life were the Master's conditions for admission into his "kingdom of grace and glory," and into his heavenly home, they were the only proper conditions for admission into any branch of his church on earth. Wesley knew that Jesus's two tests were the certain guarantee of the purity of that church in faith and in character. Then Wesley devised the probation system to put the Master's tests into effective practice.

When the rich young man came to Jesus the Master applied no doctrinal test, but his own, "By their fruits ye shall know them." He asked the young man if he kept the commandments of God. When he said he did, Jesus gave him, not a doctrinal test, but an added commandment for action that searched him to his inmost soul. This was to find the character fruit which Jesus wanted.

In the thief, perishing at his side on the cross, Jesus saw that beautiful character fruit. He put no doctrinal test, but instantly welcomed the penitent thief into his church and into his heavenly home.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered "Thou art the Christ,

the Son of the living God.” No doctrinal teaching or training, even by the Master, had brought Peter to that confession, for swiftly Jesus said, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, Peter, but my Father which is in heaven.” Again instantly Jesus added, “Upon this rock will I build my church,” upon hearts moved to a living loving faith in him by the power of the Holy Spirit working deep in the heart the sublime mysterious change which Jesus defined as “born again.” Upon that rock Jesus built his church, and not on a doctrinal test.

When Simon offered to buy the gift of the Holy Ghost with money, it is written that he believed and was baptized. Apparently, he could have passed the doctrinal test. But Peter saw the Master’s tests were not fulfilled, and told the poor wretch his heart was not right with God, and that he was still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity.

John Wesley well knew when he rejected the doctrinal test that multitudes would smoothly and glibly assent to it, who could not face the Master’s tests, and would be unfit for church membership. Therefore he wrote into the General Rules, with wonderful skill, the Master’s two tests, a pure heart and a holy life, knowing with that spiritual intuition characteristic of all his thinking, that here was the security of

the church for purity of faith and purity of life.

But under the doctrinal test as enacted by the General Conference, a person who fulfills the Master's tests, who has experienced the new birth and is living a holy life, and has been received by the Lord Jesus into his church, and has the witness of the Spirit that he is accepted of God, such a person is not qualified by such an experience for admission into the Methodist Episcopal Church, and cannot get in till he passes the doctrinal test which Jesus never used or taught, and which John Wesley, for that reason, rejected.

This leads to amazing results, namely, that the only practical effect of the doctrinal test is to exclude from the church some persons of rarely beautiful character who, loving the Master with a pure faith, cannot conscientiously assent to the doctrinal test.

The General Conference of 1864 sent a committee to President Lincoln to assure him of the loyal support of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the prosecution of the war. But it enacted a doctrinal test which made it impossible for Lincoln to join the church, for Lincoln had said the reason he had joined no church was that he could not assent without reservations to their Articles of Religion and Confessions of

Faith. But, he said, if any church made its condition of membership that he should "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself," that church he would join with all his heart. When Lincoln's little boy Willie died, the great President was heart-broken. Out of the agony of that great grief he wrote to a godly woman, whose character he deeply revered, a letter in which he stated that he believed he had experienced that change of heart for which she prayed. On the basis of that change of heart, a heart full of love to God and man, John Wesley would have received Abraham Lincoln with open arms into his societies. But if Abraham Lincoln had appeared before the General Conference at Des Moines, not the entire Board of Bishops could have received him into the Methodist Episcopal Church, because he could not conscientiously assent to the doctrinal test. It would have taken a special act of the General Conference to admit him. Every delegate, therefore, who voted for the doctrinal test, voted, in effect, to exclude from membership in the church the signer of the Proclamation of Emancipation.

This, of course, has a peculiar significance for the colored delegates, not one of whom could, by any human influence, have been persuaded to



utter a word or lift a finger that would, in the faintest degree, mar their reverent memory of Abraham Lincoln.

The doctrinal test, then, has this result. A candidate for membership in the church who has fulfilled the Master's test for admission into his church, who has experienced the new birth, and is living a holy life, is not qualified by that experience for admission. The Master has received him into his church on that basis; the Methodist Episcopal Church will not receive him into its membership on that basis, the Master's basis, but requires the added doctrinal test which the Master never used.

Wesley's second purpose in rejecting the doctrinal test was to hold the church steadfastly true to the fundamental principle of the great Reformation. This principle was violated when the doctrinal test was enacted by the General Conference of 1864, and sustained by the General Conference at Des Moines.

That fundamental principle was the right of private judgment in the interpretation of Scripture.

Luther's struggle to vindicate this principle against the age-long tyranny of the Church of Rome, is the sublimest effort of the human mind which history anywhere records. When, at the great assembly of the diet at Worms, in the

presence of the mightiest of earth's potentates, he solemnly raised his hand, in vindication of his own right, a humble monk, to interpret the Scriptures according to his own mind and conscience, and said, "I cannot do otherwise, so help me God," Luther's words marked a supreme epoch in the history of the human mind, and in the progress of the human race.

The Roman Catholic Church had always denied the right of private judgment in the interpretation of Scripture, and crystallized that principle in the decree of the Vatican Council in 1870, which defined the doctrine of papal infallibility. Here it is: "The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal church, by the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that his church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and that, therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the church." This is the doctrinal test in its most stringent, autocratic form. No Roman Catholic can exercise the slightest liberty in the private interpre-

tation of Scripture. He must take the interpretation which the pope gives him. The *Index Expurgatorius* lists the books he must not read.

When John Wesley rejected the doctrinal test for membership in his societies, and established the Master's tests of a pure heart and a holy life, and publicly announced and almost vaingloriously boasted of Methodists that in receiving members into their societies "They do not impose in order to their admission any opinion whatever, they think and let think," it was his purpose to maintain for Methodists the right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures, as against the Roman Catholic denial of that right. And Wesley allowed that perfect freedom of private judgment concerning the very doctrines against which he had contended, and concerning those for which he had most constantly and powerfully contended. Wesley would never have rejected a person from membership in his societies because he believed in Calvinism, which he had fought with every resource of his powerful mind; provided the Calvinistic applicant could meet the Master's test of the new birth and a holy life. That was all Wesley required for membership in his societies.

The great fundamental principle of the Reformation, which Wesley so carefully protected for

the members of his societies, the General Conferences of 1864 and 1920 have destroyed concerning the entire ground covered by the Articles of Religion. No member of the Methodist Episcopal Church has any right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures covered by the Articles of Religion. And as they cover almost the entire ground of Christian teaching, the doctrinal test comes little short of the Vatican decree in destroying the right of private interpretation of Scriptures for which Luther struggled, and which Wesley established in his societies.

The Methodist Episcopal Church should make no mistake here, for a mistake here reaches to the utmost foundations of the entire Protestant world. She has placed in her constitution the fact that John Wesley is the constitutional expounder of her doctrines. John Wesley utterly, and as emphatically as human language could express it, rejected the doctrinal test. Abel Stevens, the standard historian of the church, states this fully in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. II, p. 217, and adds: "The possible results of such liberality were once discussed in the Conference. Wesley conclusively determined the debate by remarking, 'I have no more right to object to a man holding different opinions from me than I have

to differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair; but if he take his wig off, and begins to shake the powder about my eyes, I shall consider it my duty to get quit of him as soon as possible.' ” “Is a man,” he writes, “a believer in Jesus Christ, and is his life suitable to his profession, are not only the main, but the sole inquiries I make in order to his admission into our society.”

Wesley was strict in his requirements of those who were to exercise the teaching power, but rejected the doctrinal test for admission into his societies, because he had no right to force any person's opinion who was a true believer in Christ, and whose life proved it.

It is worthy of careful study how two General Conferences have so flatly repudiated the teaching of the constitutional expounder of the doctrines of the church, but it is worthy of still more careful study how two General Conferences repudiated the teaching and example of the divine Head of the church. They have not only done this; they have placed themselves side by side with the Vatican Council by denying to Methodists, what Wesley strove so hard to maintain for them, the right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures, concerning the entire field covered by the Articles of Religion. These General Conferences have

further determined that true faith in Christ, and a life that proves it, do not qualify any person for admission into the Methodist Episcopal Church. In addition to the Master's test for admission into his church and the heavenly home; in addition to Wesley's tests, which are the same as the Master's, for admission into his societies, one is not qualified for admission into the Methodist Episcopal Church until he abandons the right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures secured by the Reformation to the Protestant world, and submits to have his belief concerning the entire field of the Articles of Religion fixed for him by the General Conference through a doctrinal test. Herein the General Conferences have placed themselves in principle upon a perfect equality with the Vatican Council in destroying liberty of opinion, and they could not consistently inveigh against the doctrine of papal infallibility, for by statutory enactment they have done the same.

Now, anybody who watched and listened to the General Conference at Des Moines, and recognized its true spirit, would know that nothing could be farther from its purpose than interference with true Christian liberty of thought in the interpretation of Scripture as taught by Martin Luther and John Wesley; least of all was there in that highly intelligent

body of men and women anything but the deepest antipathy for papal infallibility or the Council that defined it. Its mistake grew, not out of its spirit or purpose, but out of the fact that it did not perceive the true nature of the doctrinal test, its far-reaching, subtly penetrating relations, its destructive effect upon fundamental Methodist principles, and its complete lack of harmony with the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not at all strange, nor a reflection upon the intelligence of the members, for the doctrinal test has never been discussed, except sporadically, in the *Advocates* or other publications, and the church therefore is uninformed on the subject. Dr. Faulkner had an article in *The Christian Advocate* of August 31, 1911, but there has been no general or adequate discussion. Though Wesley's position was stated in the majority report of the Judiciary Committee, it was lost sight of in the fogs of debate which clouded its meaning.

No person, of course, can seriously claim that assent to the Articles of Religion is necessary to salvation, or that it is necessary for admission into Christ's Church, because he never taught anything of the kind. To claim this would, in effect, be saying that all members of other churches are lost.

The General Conference failed to perceive

that soundness of doctrine, to which it was loyally devoted, could not be attained by the doctrinal test, but must be accomplished by the Master's tests of the new birth and a holy life, and by holding the teaching power of the church true to doctrine in the pulpit, education, press, hymnology, and pastoral ministration.

The danger from unsound doctrine—and that is a real danger which the church should carefully watch—will always be in the poisonous infection of the teaching power. A preacher, professor, editor, writer, pastor, whose mind has been poisoned by the subtle venom of materialistic evolution, destructive higher criticism, or German rationalistic philosophy, is the real source of danger from unsound doctrine.

No man should be permitted to serve in any position in the teaching power of the church who is not from the heart true to the Articles of Religion. The General Conference has unlimited authority, and should use it wisely and firmly, to protect the teaching power, and hence the church, from the insidious poison of unsound teaching. As long as its teaching power functions true, and the Master's tests are intelligently applied for admission into the church, it is as safely protected against unsound doctrine as it is possible for human effort to do it.

It is interesting here to note that no other



branch of Methodism, so far as the writer knows, uses the doctrinal test. Dr. Faulkner writes that the Methodist Protestant Church holds "acceptance of Christ as Saviour, and the Spirit as sanctifier and guide, are the only doctrinal requirements. Among Elementary Principles, No. 3 is as follows: No person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ and obeys the gospel of God our Saviour ought to be deprived of church membership."

This is the Master's test, this is John Wesley's test, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, so far as the writer knows, is the only branch of Methodism that has departed from it.

#### DISASTER TO THE CHURCH

THE report of the minority of the Judiciary Committee of the General Conference on the writer's appeal on the constitutionality of the doctrinal test, contains, as reported in the Daily Advocate, the following statement:

"The far-reaching effect, disastrous in the highest degree to the spiritual power of the church, if the contention of the majority report is upheld, must be apparent to all."

"It would make of our Articles of Religion merely a set of recommended doctrines with no authority over the faith of the people, and any person, no matter whether he were Jew, Moham-

medan, or pagan, could claim membership in the church with impunity."

The writer read this statement with the most intense astonishment, but as he knew there was no real basis of fact in it, he gave it little attention, as he supposed the General Conference would readily perceive its true character. In this, however, he was mistaken, for the statement led many members of the General Conference to believe that dropping the doctrinal test would bring disaster to the church, and this belief apparently determined the majority of eighty-seven in favor of the constitutionality of the doctrinal test.

It should be carefully observed that the statement was entirely irrelevant to the constitutional question to be settled, and should never have been made. A motion was made to drop it from the report, but the motion was voted down. If it were true that dropping the doctrinal test would bring disaster to the church, that had no bearing whatever on the question whether the constitution as it stands gives the General Conference power to enact the test. If the constitution, fairly construed, does not give the General Conference power to enact a doctrinal test, and dropping the test will bring disaster to the church, the way to meet that difficulty is not to read into the constitution something that is

not there; the right way to meet such a difficulty is to amend the constitution so the church will be adequately protected. Getting alarmed over supposed dangers to the church, and then reading into the constitution what is not there in order to protect the church, is a sure way of destroying the true constitutional procedure, and a sure way of destroying confidence in the constitution.

Having made this statement, the minority should have pointed to disasters that have happened to churches which have no doctrinal test. There are numbers of these churches. In fact, the writer knows no Protestant Church that has such a doctrinal test as ours. Only the Vatican decree of papal infallibility surpasses it in severity. But the minority did not do this because it could not, for no church has ever suffered disaster because it had no doctrinal test.

That the influence of the Articles of Religion is deeply fundamental in the spiritual life and work of the church, and that anything which materially weakens the influence of the Articles in that spiritual life and work will certainly bring disaster to the church, is obviously true. It is evident that the minority thought that dropping the doctrinal test would weaken the influence of the Articles of Religion and have the disastrous effect mentioned. This belief determined their

opinion, with the help of various authorities, that the doctrinal test is constitutional.

But that the doctrinal test is the means through which the Articles of Religion exercise their normal and powerful influence we have seen is an error of the gravest and most far-reaching kind. It is of the highest importance that the church should clearly understand that neither the presence nor the absence of the doctrinal test determines the spiritual life and success of the church. That life and that success are always determined by the doctrines of salvation, let it be earnestly repeated, in the Articles of Religion, and those Articles have always and must always exercise their normal and powerful function through the teaching power of the church. They never have exercised and never can exercise their influence through the doctrinal test. When this fact is clearly understood, all anxiety concerning dropping the doctrinal test will quietly disappear, for no person who calmly considers the facts can believe that dropping the doctrinal test will bring disaster, for the facts, with the most perfect clearness, demonstrate the exact opposite.

During the first eighty years of the history of the church, from 1784, when it was organized, to 1864, when the General Conference enacted the doctrinal test, there was no such test for admis-

sion into the church. During all that time the absence of the doctrinal test caused no disaster of any kind. No Jews, no Mohammedans, no pagans, no infidels claimed membership in the church "with impunity." It is an obvious fact that such persons have never shown the slightest desire to join the church, but have sometimes shown the most venomous hostility to the church. But if such persons attempted to join, either with or without the doctrinal test, they must, under the "one condition previously required" of the constitution, face the Master's test for admission into the church—the new birth and a holy life. The probation period gives every intelligent pastor and missionary ample time to determine whether the applicant can properly meet this true constitutional test of membership.

But those first eighty years were a period of the church's most marvelous prosperity. Through that entire period the Articles of Religion were functioning, with most amazing power and success, through all departments of the teaching power, though the doctrinal test was absent. That without the doctrinal test the Articles of Religion would be "merely a set of recommended doctrines with no authority over the faith of the people," is a statement which the marvelous prosperity of those eighty years

utterly refutes. This is true of the entire eighty years, but it is most astoundingly true of the last fifty-six of the eighty.

The membership of the church in 1808 was 144,590 (Buckley's *History of the Methodists*, p. 315). In 1864 the membership was 928,320 (Curtis's *Manual Methodist Episcopal Church History*, p. 315). In 1920 the membership is 4,175,502 (The *Christian Advocate*, Year Book of Churches, February 26, 1920).

In the fifty-six years after the doctrinal test was enacted, from 1864 to 1920, the membership increased from 928,320 to 4,175,502, or a fraction over 449 per cent. We are entitled to think this a truly great achievement, for it certainly was.

But during the fifty-six years immediately preceding the enactment of the doctrinal test, from 1808 to 1864, the membership increased from 144,590 to 928,320, or a fraction over 642 per cent. And what adds most amazingly to this marvelous record is the fact that the General Conference of 1848 reported a loss of 532,290 members (Buckley's *Constitutional History*, p. 278) through the secession of the Southern Methodist Church in 1844; and the General Conference of 1864 reported a loss of 66,127 members through the Civil War (Curtis's *Manual*, p. 234). This most amazing success was

achieved in spite of two of the most terrible disasters the church ever experienced, and the success was accomplished without the doctrinal test.

It stands, then, as a luminous fact that the fifty-six years without the doctrinal test, immediately preceding the introduction of the doctrinal test, are the most successful period in the history of the church.

If there has been any disaster to the church connected with the doctrinal test, it must have been caused by the establishment of that test, for the fifty-six years under the doctrinal test have fallen behind the fifty-six years without the test 193 per cent; and to equal the success of the period without the test our membership now should be not 4,175,512, but 5,959,981. Now, if this decrease in prosperity under the doctrinal test of 1,784,469 members is to be considered a disaster to the church, how is it to be explained on the basis of the minority statement under consideration? According to that statement it ought to have been caused by the absence of the doctrinal test. But the plain historic truth is it occurred under the doctrinal test, while the most marvelous success in the history of the church occurred in the absence of the doctrinal test. Does the presence of the doctrinal test, then, mean disaster to the church?

If the reasoning method of the minority were followed these facts would compel us to admit that the enactment of the doctrinal test caused the most frightful disaster that ever fell upon the church—the loss of 1,784,469 members. But such reasoning would be fallacious. The enactment of the doctrinal test had no influence whatever upon the decrease, beyond keeping out of the church some very conscientious Christians who could not assent to that test. There were not 1,784,469 of them. Under the doctrinal test the teaching power of the church has functioned the Articles of Religion precisely as it did without the test. The presence or absence of the doctrinal test for admission into the church has no influence whatever on the teaching power of the church, hence no influence upon its spiritual power or life.

How the minority and their friends persuaded themselves that in the absence of the doctrinal test the Articles of Religion would be “merely a set of recommended doctrines” is hard to understand, when their commanding position in the constitution of the church as the fixed standard of doctrine would remain untouched, and the entire teaching power of the church would continue to function then as always since the foundation of the church.

Would our more than eighteen thousand



ministers cease to preach and minister our doctrines because the doctrinal test was dropped? Would they on that account be false to their solemn vow to "preach and maintain them"?

Would our missionaries in the absence of the doctrinal test cease to teach and preach them?

A solitary illustration will show how our educational system makes the Articles of Religion a living power.

The writer lives at Indianola, Iowa, the seat of Simpson College, in whose chapel hangs a very beautiful oil portrait of Bishop Simpson, for whom the college is named, and whose saintly spirit still lingers in the college halls. Could Bishop Simpson have been present when the president of the college preached his last baccalaureate sermon, his heart would have deeply rejoiced to see the environment, and hear the teaching of Methodist principles as they are defined in the Articles of Religion.

We have at Indianola a great church of over fifteen hundred members, and a Sunday school whose attendance has passed twelve hundred. The large church was filled with a great audience to hear the baccalaureate sermon. At its close a listener on the front seat in the audience arose and said: "I wish to make a motion. During the General Conference we have been listening to some of the most eloquent and powerful speakers

in the church, but it is my deep conviction that up to the present moment we have heard nothing more eloquent or powerful than the message we have heard this morning. I wish to move that this great audience be permitted to express, by a rising vote, its deep appreciation of the sound philosophy, the exalted statesmanship, the intense patriotism, and the pure and deep religious principle to which we have listened this morning, and our joy that our teacher is to remain with us as the president of our college and the leader of our young people." The pastor put the motion, and the great audience arose as one man.

Here the Articles of Religion were working in their finest manner. And in exactly that way and in all the activities of college life, they work through the entire magnificent circle of our schools. Would they cease to do so if the doctrinal test were dropped? Evidently, that would have not the slightest effect.

Did the minority forget that the Bishops would constantly be interpreting the Articles of Religion in terms of life, of character, and of salvation all over the world? Would dropping the doctrinal test cripple their preaching or administration? Evidently, not in the least. During the General Conference five of the bishops preached at Indianola to great congrega-

tions in which students were a very prominent element. In the preaching of all the bishops the Articles of Religion were a dominant factor.

Is it necessary to ask if dropping the doctrinal test would have any effect upon the prodigious world-wide output of the press of the church, or upon its hymnology?

Our book editor would most certainly see that the Book Concern kept true to the Articles of Religion, and our hymns would go on singing to countless millions their messages of faith, hope, and love, as taught by the Articles.

Disaster to the church and its spiritual life if the doctrinal test were dropped? The dropping of that test would have no more effect upon the spiritual life of the church than the dropping of a dead autumn leaf would have upon the broad bosom of the ocean.

Why the Articles of Religion cannot be effective in the doctrinal test is easily seen.

If I invite a friend to dine with me, then put on his plate pieces of granite, limestone, sandstone, flint, and say to him that the stones contain good nourishment, and that he may eat and be satisfied, I tell him the truth as to the nourishment, but neither the truth nor the nourishment in the stones can benefit him. Nature must first by cold, and heat, and moisture disintegrate the stones, and vegetation,

that is, life, must transform them into forms suitable for digestion. But a professor may use the stones in his laboratory helpfully with his classes.

The Articles of Religion contain all the elements of spiritual nutrition, but in the highly indigestible form of abstruse, flinty, dogmatic, theological definition, tough as the most obdurate feldspathic granite, forms which tested such assemblies of learned theologians as the councils of Chalcedon and Trent to the utmost of their intellectual faculties. Yet till recently the church was compelling children to pass judgment on these recondite subjects, and still compels all adults to pass judgment on them as a condition of admission into the church. They contain the knottiest theological problems of the ages, and any skillful dialectician could take the Articles of Religion and very soon helplessly corner any member of the General Conference, or any of the Bishops. To require as a condition for admission into the church assent to such a compendium of systematic theology and church history as the Articles of Religion are, is in the highest sense unwise. The writer asked the late Judge Deemer how long it would take him to prepare himself to answer the question intelligently. He smiled and answered, "Two years."

This requirement is unwise as an educational measure, while, in addition, it is a clear departure from the Master's method. When Jesus was teaching his disciples he set a little child in their midst. He taught the profoundest lessons of his gospel from the grass, the flowers, the sparrows, the hair of our heads, the sheep, the goats, from fire, light, darkness, water, from all things plain and simple. The instruction, therefore, of probationers should be simple, luminous, and sweet as the Beatitudes. Technical dogmatic formulæ should be conspicuous by their absence. Not till they have been transformed by the living teacher into forms of life and salvation can the elements of spiritual life in the Articles of Religion reach and nourish the spiritual life. But the theological professor can wisely use them in the laboratory of his classroom, to lay, deep in the hearts of his students, the foundations of a true faith.

It was for reasons like the foregoing that Dr. Faulkner very truly wrote of the doctrinal test, "It has no relation whatever to increase or decrease in the church, because not one member in a thousand, admitted since 1864, has ever taken it seriously." The plain truth is that the question, as ordinarily asked, is an empty form.

Always the writer, as a pastor, conversed earnestly, and prayed with each probationer

over the question, "Have you saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?" He affectionately explained that to the Master this was the necessary condition for admission into his church and the home he had gone to prepare. The probationer who, from a loving heart, answered that question, and gave heed faithfully to the Master's words, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me," was prepared for reception into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, or any branch of it. Such a person had not only fulfilled the Master's requirements for admission into his church; he had also fulfilled "the one condition previously required" by the constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church for admission into its membership, as that requirement was formulated by John Wesley.

It is exceedingly difficult to understand how it ever came to be believed in the church that asking an empty formal question, perfectly meaningless to the young, and also to the average adult, could ever have any helpful relation to the spiritual life of the church. It never has had such relation, and it never can.

The progress of other churches which do not have the doctrinal test is an interesting study. Judge Henry Wade Rogers explained to the General Conference that the Church of England

does not use its Thirty-nine Articles as a condition of membership, and that the British Wesleyan and the Irish Wesleyan Churches have no doctrinal test. None of these churches has suffered any disaster on account of the absence of the doctrinal test. The British Wesleyan Church has to contend against the immense power and prestige of the Church of England, and the Irish Wesleyan Church has to contend against the Roman Catholic Church, more powerful in Ireland than in any other country probably. This will explain the moderate progress of Irish and English Methodism.

But the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Church of Canada have our Articles of Religion and our General Rules, but no doctrinal test. A careful comparison of the pro rata relationship to the population in the three American Methodisms gives immensely significant results.

The membership of the Methodist Church of Canada, as reported to the General Conference at Des Moines by the fraternal delegate from Canada, the Rev. Albert Moore, D.D., is 386,383; that of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 2,152,974; and that of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 4,175,502. The population of Canada is 7,204,000, of the thirteen Southern States 24,878,000, of the Northern

States, 67,094,000. The census of 1910 is used. The last census would change the figures, but would probably not materially affect the result.

The relation of membership to population in these churches is for the Methodist Episcopal Church, .06; for the Canadian Church, .0502; and for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, .086. These figures show that the Canadian Church, without the doctrinal test, is but slightly behind us; but they show that for the Methodist Episcopal Church, with its doctrinal test, to equal the growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, without the doctrinal test, it should now have a membership, not of 4,175,502, but of 5,770,084. Without the doctrinal test the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, has surpassed the Methodist Episcopal Church, with the doctrinal test, proportionately to their respective populations, by 1,594,582. The Church South has to struggle with a problem vastly more serious than the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland—the race problem of more than ten millions of Negroes.

Upon what reasonable basis can we, in our negotiations for unification, ask our Southern brethren to abandon their historic Wesleyan position and adopt our un-Wesleyan doctrinal test?



In view of this array of stalwart success, without the doctrinal test, thus far given, what is the nature of the alarming prophecy of disaster if that test is dropped?

There is, however, another series of illuminating facts. Dr. Faulkner secured statements from leading men of other denominations.

Dr. G. W. Richards, of the Reformed Church in the United States, writes that the Apostles' Creed "is made the doctrinal condition for church membership."

Dr. J. A. Singmaster, of the Lutheran Church and president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, writes: "The United Lutheran Church does not require of the laity any subscription to Lutheran Symbols. . . The text book is the Small Catechism for confirmation of youth, but the pledge is only to the Apostles' Creed."

It should be noted that the Apostles' Creed is not a doctrinal test as our Articles of Religion are. The latter are a very abstruse and technical body of theological definitions. The former is a list of facts taken from the New Testament without word, or comment, or any explanation.

Dr. Edward P. Johnson, of the Reformed Church in America, writes, "The doctrinal tests in our church are much the same as in yours—simply learn by plain kindly inquiries whether

the candidate can sincerely respond to the test given by the apostle to the Philippian jailer—believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

Dr. Frederick William Loetcher, of the Presbyterian Church, writes, “Persons—not ministers—are admitted into membership of the Presbyterian Church, and so far as I know always have been, without the subscription of any creed.”

None of these churches has any such doctrinal test as the Methodist Episcopal Church, and no disaster of any kind has come to them as a result of the absence of the doctrinal test, nor have any Jews, Mohammedans, pagans, or infidels insinuated themselves unworthily into their membership. This alarm of disaster is a very clear case of “seein’ things at night,” and unsubstantial as an evening fog.

#### THE UNCONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE DOCTRINAL TEST

ALL that has been written up to this point is irrelevant to the question of constitutionality.

Judge Henry Wade Rogers is a learned jurist of wide experience on the bench in the United States courts. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the General Conference at Des Moines he was severely limited in discussing the

constitutional question before that body, because his sense of duty as a judge compelled him to confine his remarks strictly to the legal points involved, and exclude all others. Hence he was obliged to omit much matter necessary to the understanding of the doctrinal test. These points have now been covered, the doctrinal test in its true significance and relations has been expounded, and the question of constitutionality can be considered purely in its legal aspects. Irrelevant subjects can be excluded, a thing impossible in the General Conference. Introducing the fear of disaster to the church was a skillful movement of the minority, and it must be frankly confessed that they could plead exalted precedent, for Daniel Webster did exactly the same thing in arguing the Dartmouth College case before the Supreme Court of the United States. But such an argument is irrelevant, and has no place properly in a constitutional discussion such as the present one. It requires very high mental qualities for judges to hold themselves unmoved by such appeals to their deep feelings. But, in a supreme court fact and law must always take precedence of feeling and sympathy, and determine the decision of the court. Irrelevant issues should be rigidly excluded. It is essential to correct thinking on constitutional interpretation not to let the mind

be diverted by the supposed effect on other questions, as, if the doctrinal test is unconstitutional, how will that affect the ritual for baptism? Such questions are entirely irrelevant as to what the constitution says and means concerning the one condition for admission into the church.

Great care should be taken in the quotation of authorities. This is illustrated by the following facts.

When the writer became convinced, after many years of reading and meditation, that the doctrinal test is, without any reasonable doubt, unconstitutional, he distrusted his own judgment, not having had legal training or experience. He therefore took his legal and historical materials to the office of an old friend, the late Judge Horace E. Deemer, then chief justice of the Iowa Supreme Court. Judge Deemer went over the whole subject with his characteristic carefulness, and concurred with the writer that the doctrinal test is unconstitutional. He wrote an extended opinion which he authorized the writer to use at his discretion. It was appended to the writer's appeal.

Judge Deemer's opinion was condensed in his words, "I have read your argument and regard it as thoroughly logical and unanswerable."

The writer sent the papers to another friend, George Cosson, then attorney-general of Iowa.

Mr. Cosson wrote of the doctrinal test, "It seems to be a plain violation of both the spirit and letter of the constitution."

Neither Judge Deemer nor Mr. Cosson was a member of our church; their opinions are the unbiased judgment of outsiders.

The writer then gave the documents to Mr. Justice Silas Weaver, associate justice of the Iowa Supreme Court, and member of the Judiciary Committee of the General Conference of 1908. Judge Weaver took the papers home and after two or three months wrote as follows:

"I have read and reread your argument and confess myself unable to find a flaw in its historical accuracy or its logical conclusiveness. Either the English language has lost its meaning or there is but *one* condition previously required of those who desire admission to the Methodist Episcopal Church, and that 'one condition' is *not* a declaration of faith in the 'Articles of Religion' of that church.

"I feel no doubt such a requirement is extra-constitutional and a clear departure from the standard set up by the founder and father of Methodism.

"I can add nothing to the argument or reasoning set forth in your memorial, and which seems to me not only an argument but a demonstration.

"I sincerely hope it may command the attention it so well deserves."

The italics in the above copy are Judge Weaver's.

Bishop Smith was to preside at the writer's Conference, the Des Moines, that fall, 1914, and the writer was very anxious to get his opinion, for Bishop Smith was elected to the episcopacy largely on account of his profound knowledge of Methodist law. The writer, therefore, placed the papers in Bishop Smith's hands. He went over them very carefully and reported that he agreed with the writer entirely and was very anxious to have the question decided.

But a letter had come from Dr. Buckley, dated Morristown, New Jersey, January 28, 1914, in which he said, "I would like you to write out a full statement of the grounds on which you would take out the question, 'Do you believe in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures, etc.,' addressed to candidates for admission into full membership in the church."

The writer accordingly sent the documents to Dr. Buckley, and a facsimile copy of his reply is herewith printed. Judge Rogers explained to the General Conference that he and Dr. Buckley discussed the papers together for two hours. Dr. Buckley's letter states in nine words the result of that long and careful conference between

JAMES M. BUCKLEY  
MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY

Nov 19 1914

Dear friend Shipman:

A short time ago I met  
Judge Rogers at his office and  
your document (which I now return)  
was read, some of the parts twice  
and discussed.

The Judge agrees with you entirely  
and I "concur".

He said that you presented the  
document to the General Conference  
last 1912 but too late. He recommends  
that you dare it put in very early.

I hope you are well. I presume  
the Judge will be <sup>the one</sup> elected. He certainly  
should be.

Sincerely Yours

James M. Buckley

P. S. Presents my regards to your  
family.

one of the ablest minds on the bench, and the  
most powerful intellect in the ministerial ranks  
of the church of his lifetime, "the judge agrees

*with you entirely and I concur."* This means that if James M. Buckley had been a member of the last General Conference at Des Moines, all the resources of his keen and powerful intellect and of his commanding eloquence would have been used to convince the General Conference that the doctrinal test is unconstitutional.

Further, the Judiciary Committees of three consecutive General Conferences found the doctrinal test unconstitutional. The writer got the subject before that of 1912 by petition. It found the test unconstitutional, but the General Conference reached it late, and Judge Rogers moved the Committee be excused from reporting, and it was done. The writer got the subject before the Judiciary Committee of 1916 by appeal from the decision of a bishop. The Committee found the test unconstitutional twelve to two, four not voting. After some debate, Judge Rogers moved, owing to the lateness, that the report be postponed, which was done. The Judiciary Committee of the last General Conference found the test unconstitutional fourteen to five. Of the seven judges in the Committee, six, including Judge Rogers, found the test unconstitutional. The opinion of three consecutive Judiciary Committees, all agreeing on the same subject, was never before reversed in the history of the church. It is not likely that any Judiciary



Committee, normally organized, would find the doctrinal test constitutional.

All these facts have been carefully stated in order to reach clearly this point, namely, that this array of the highest legal authority, out of the church and in the church, does *not prove* the doctrinal test unconstitutional. It can only create a reasonable probability of it. The legal proof of unconstitutionality must come from an entirely different source.

And first it is proper and very necessary to consider upon what principles a General Conference, acting as a Supreme Court, may correctly determine a constitutional question of interpretation.

Here should be noted a principle stated by Chief Justice Chase in the *Hepburn vs. Griswold* case already alluded to: "The court always approached the consideration of questions of this nature reluctantly; and its constant rule of decision has been, and is, that acts of Congress must be regarded as constitutional unless clearly shown to be otherwise." This rule should govern the General Conference as Supreme Court, and acts of the General Conference should be regarded as constitutional "unless clearly shown to be otherwise."

Further, it is very essential for the General Conference, acting as Supreme Court, to be

guided by the true principle of interpretation. This true principle has been stated with perfect clearness by the greatest master of constitutional interpretation the United States has produced, John Marshall, for thirty-four years chief justice of the United States Supreme Court. Marshall's work in laying down the fundamental principle of constitutional interpretation, and in developing the interpretation of the constitution of the United States in harmony with that principle, is the greatest, the most uniformly followed piece of law work in the judicial procedure of the courts in the United States.

Daniel Webster said of Marshall, "I have never seen a man of whose intellect I had a higher opinion." Chief Justice Chase wrote of Marshall, "Whose decisions upon the delicate and important questions at this period arising, by their wisdom, their justice, and their explicitness, commend themselves equally to the understanding, the conscience, and the heart of all citizens."

Marshall's intellect was so clear, so penetrating, and so profound that his opinions for the Supreme Court rarely caused dissent among his associates on the supreme bench. When a member of Congress, Marshall made a speech in defense of the President, John Adams, against whom Livingston, of New York, had brought in

a resolution of censure for advising the United States judge at Charleston to surrender Jonathan Robbins to the British authorities, who accused him of a crime for which they afterward executed him. When Marshall was to speak, Albert Gallatin took a seat near him to make notes for a reply, but presently pushed aside his pencil and papers and retired. A friend asked him if he meant to reply, and Gallatin answered, "I do not."

"Why not?"

"Because I cannot. If you can, I wish you would. There is absolutely no reply to make, for his speech is unanswerable."

Marshall defined his fundamental principle of constitutional interpretation in the case of *Gibbons vs. Ogden*, Wheaton, Vol. IX, page 187. Then he restated it more clearly and succinctly in *Ogden vs. Saunders*, Wheaton, Vol. XII, page 332, as given below. Marshall rejected alike the strict construction of Jefferson and his school, and the liberal construction of Hamilton and his school, and laid down the fundamental constructive principle that has guided the procedure of the United States Supreme Court and all the courts in constitutional interpretation. Here is John Marshall's great principle:

"To say that the intention of the instrument must prevail, that the intention must be col-

lected from its words, that the words are to be understood in that sense in which they are generally used by those for whom the instrument was intended, that its provisions are neither to be restricted into insignificance, nor extended to objects not comprehended in them nor contemplated by its framers, is to repeat what has been already said more at large, and is all that can be necessary."

Words are unable to tell the profound influence which this great principle has exercised, not only upon the entire jurisprudence of the United States and all the States, but upon the entire history of the country.

The General Conference at Des Moines was called upon, by the writer's appeal, to construe as the Supreme Court of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the following passage in the constitution of the church, ¶ 29 of the Discipline, "There is only one condition previously required of those who seek admission into these societies — 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.' "

If Marshall's principle, "that the intention of the instrument must prevail, that the intention must be collected from the words, that its words are to be understood in that sense in which they are generally used by those for whom the instrument was intended," is fairly applied to the

words, "There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies," there is only one possible interpretation, there is but one condition for admission into the Methodist Episcopal Church as defined by its constitution, consequently the General Conference has no power to enact another. This is why Judge Weaver wrote, "Either the English language has lost its meaning or there is but *one* condition previously required of those who desire admission into the Methodist Episcopal Church, and that 'one condition' is *not* a declaration of faith in the 'Articles of Religion' of that church." That "one condition" is, as stated, "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." That this "one condition" refers to admission on probation, as was argued before the General Conference, is exactly that kind of interpretation which John Marshall so clearly rejects in his great principle, for it reads into the words of the constitution a meaning they do not have or give the slightest hint of. This interpretation plainly violates John Marshall's principle where it states that the words of the constitution are not to be "extended to objects not comprehended in them or contemplated by its framers." The plain, clear, natural meaning of the words excludes this interpretation, and John Wesley, who framed the

words, did not contemplate such an interpretation.

The constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church, nowhere in that instrument, gives the faintest hint concerning probation. Probation is not in the constitution. It is purely a statutory enactment, is entirely in the power of the General Conference, which can modify or abolish it. Probationers are not members of the church. Their relation is a preparation for membership. They have never been "admitted into these societies," have no right of trial by a committee, can take no part in the legal procedure of the church, except as witnesses, and cannot be members of the Quarterly Conference. They are expressly deprived by law of all the rights guaranteed to members of the church by the fifth Restrictive Rule, and the pastor can drop their names whenever he thinks best. To read probation into ¶ 29 of the constitution is not only a violation of John Marshall's fundamental principle of constitutional interpretation, it is a violation of one of the plainest facts of the constitution of the church, namely, that probation is not in the constitution. It can be found in the constitution only by those who read it in because they want it there.

It is a fact, peculiarly significant, that Mr. Justice John Marshall, of the Supreme Court of

Kansas, a member of the Judiciary Committee, interpreted the passage of the constitution under consideration precisely as his great predecessor of the same name would have interpreted it, namely, that it means exactly what it says, that there is *only one condition previously required* for admission into these societies, and the General Conference has no power to enact another.

Were this passage of the constitution of the church submitted to the Supreme Court of the United States, that great court would follow, without the slightest doubt, John Marshall's great principle of interpretation, and there would be just as little doubt that it would bring in a decision, unanimous as on the eighteenth amendment, that the constitution means what it plainly says, that there is only one condition previously required for admission into the church, consequently the General Conference has no power to enact another, and consequently the one it did enact, the doctrinal test, is unconstitutional.

The true principle of constitutional interpretation has been stated, and applied to the part of the constitution under consideration, but in construing the constitution it is proper to ask if there is any person who can authoritatively expound the meaning of the words we are studying.

Evidently, the majority of the Judiciary Committee could give no such authoritative exposition. They could only give an opinion and support it by such legal and historical arguments as they could find. Neither could the minority give an authorized interpretation. They likewise could only frame an opinion and sustain it by such legal and historical arguments as they could find. The same is true of Baker, Porter, Bishop Merrill, or any other student of the subject, or any organized body, such as a Conference.

Is it not clear that the only man who can give an authoritative explanation of the meaning of the words under consideration is the man who wrote them, John Wesley, who, with his brother Charles, wrote the General Rules in 1743.

A college president said to the writer from his seat in the General Conference, "Do we have to follow John Wesley?"

Inevitably we must follow John Wesley in those particulars in which the church has made him our constitutional guide. The first Restrictive Rule forbids the General Conference to "establish any new standards of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine." There has never been any difference of opinion in the church about the fact that those "established standards of doctrine" are John Wesley's Sermons and Notes on



the New Testament. The first Restrictive Rule, therefore, makes John Wesley the constitutional expounder of the doctrines of the church, that is, of the Articles of Religion which he himself prepared, and consequently the General Conference is under constitutional obligation to follow John Wesley in his exposition of those Articles.

In two ways, therefore, Wesley is in the highest sense an authority on the meaning of the passage in the constitution which we are interpreting. First, he wrote it, and, second, he is the constitutional expounder of the Articles of Religion as of all the doctrines of the church. Higher authority it is not possible to have, and his judgment on doctrines is constitutionally decisive. It is the doctrines of the church as defined in the Articles of Religion that are involved in the doctrinal test.

In his *Journal* of May 1, 1738 (Vol. I, p. 80, Dutton Edition), Wesley clearly explains the meaning of the words in the General Rules under consideration, namely "admission into these societies."

Wesley used to ask a series of questions. Here they are, and it will be seen that there is not the slightest trace of a doctrinal test in them. They are to be found in Wesley's *Works*, Vol. VIII, page 272, London edition:

RULES OF THE BAND SOCIETIES DRAWN UP  
DECEMBER 28, 1738

1. Have you forgiveness of your sins?
2. Have you peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God?
4. Have you the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin outward or inward dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told of all your faults and that plain and home? [The word "home" is an idiom.]
8. Do you desire that every one of us shall tell you from time to time whatsoever is in our heart concerning you?
9. Consider, Do you desire that we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear concerning you?
10. Do you desire that in so doing we shall come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
11. Is it your desire and design to be on this and on all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart without

exception, without disguises, and without reserve?

Any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as occasion offers, the four following at every meeting:

1. What sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you had?
3. How were you delivered?
4. Have you thought, said, or done of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?

These questions were asked at the regular Band meetings and indicate plainly the kind of questions that would be asked probationers.

Then Wesley writes of applicants for admission, and it is here he explains for us the words we are interpreting, "That after two months trial, if no objection appear, they may be *admitted into the society.*" The italics are the writer's, used because the words perfectly explain what Wesley meant when he used them in the General Rule, namely, "There is only one condition previously required of those who desire *admission into these societies.*" If we are to interpret Wesley's words here, "*admission into these societies,*" by his own use of them, he meant admission after two months on trial, hence could not have meant admission on probation.

This interpretation harmonizes with John Marshall's great principle, and it well fulfills the condition upon which an act of the General Conference may be declared unconstitutional, namely, that an act must be declared "constitutional, unless clearly shown to be otherwise." The act that established the doctrinal test has been clearly shown to be "otherwise."

That this is so is very strongly supported by Wesley's very plain and explicit utterances. These are recorded in Abel Stevens's *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. II, pages 216, 217, as follows:

"Of few things connected with Methodism does Wesley speak oftener, or with more devout gratulation, than of doctrinal liberality. 'One circumstance,' he says, 'is quite peculiar to the people called Methodists; that is the terms upon which any person may be admitted to their society. They do not impose in order to their admission any opinion whatever. Let them hold particular or general redemption, absolute or conditional decrees: They think and let think. One condition and one only is required—a real desire to save their souls. Where this is, it is enough, they desire no more, they lay stress upon nothing else, they only ask, "Is thy heart herein as my heart? If so give me thy hand." 'Is there,' he adds, 'any other society in Great

Britain or Ireland that is so far removed from bigotry? That is of so truly catholic spirit? So ready to admit all serious persons without distinction? Where is there another such society in Europe? In the habitable world? I know none. Let any man show me if he can. Till then let no man talk of the bigotry of the Methodists.' When, in his eighty-fifth year, preaching in Glasgow, he wrote: 'I subjoined a short account of Methodism, particularly insisting this circumstance—There is no other religious society under heaven which requires nothing of men, in order to their admission into it, but a desire to save their souls. Look around you, you cannot be admitted into the Church, or Society of the Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Quakers, or others unless you hold the same opinions with them, and adhere to the same mode of worship. The Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion. Now, I do not know any other religious society, either ancient or modern, wherein such liberty of conscience is now allowed since the age of the apostles. Here is our glorying and glory peculiar to us. What society shares it with us?' The possible results of such liberality were once discussed in the Conference. Wesley conclusively determined the debate by remarking: 'I have no more right to object to a man for holding a different opinion from me

than I have to differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair; but if he takes his wig off, and begins to shake the powder about my eyes, I shall consider it my duty to get quit of him as soon as possible.' 'Is a man,' he writes, 'a believer in Jesus Christ, and is his life suitable to his profession? are not only the main, but the sole inquiries I make in order to his admission into our Society.' "

To say that, after such utterances as these, Wesley left the way open for the institution of the most severe, the most drastic, the most difficult doctrinal test in the Protestant world, is to accuse him of a crude intellectual dullness and an obvious moral insincerity that were alike entirely foreign to his mind and heart.

The fundamental wrong of the doctrinal test can now be fully seen. It is wrong for two reasons that profoundly affect its constitutional status:

First, it violates principles basic in Methodism from the beginning, and thus basic because they were the direct teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, and for that reason were carefully wrought into the General Rules by John Wesley and became a part of the constitution of the church.

Second, it violates the plain meaning of the words of the constitution "understood in that

sense in which they are generally used by those for whom they were intended."

### THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AS A SUPREME COURT

THE great constitutional debate in the last General Conference serves, in a very compelling way, to bring to the attention of the church a fact long obvious to thoughtful minds, namely, the General Conference, by reason of those very principles of its organization that make it great and highly efficient as a representative legislative assembly, is not adapted to perform, in the best manner, the functions of a supreme court.

The limitations in it which lead to this result are intrinsic in its organization, and entirely unavoidable in a body so constituted. As before said, the General Conference when acting as the Supreme Court of the church is undoubtedly performing its most exalted function, for it is handling the foundations of the church. It is therefore essential to the highest interests of the church that this exalted function should be exercised under the conditions best adapted to reach the best results. But these best conditions cannot be realized by the General Conference.

The reasons for this have been pointed out, that is the most important of them, by the two

greatest constitutional lawyers of the Revolutionary period.

Writing in the *Federalist* on the formation of the Supreme Court of the United States, Alexander Hamilton says, "The members of the Legislature will rarely be chosen with a view to those qualifications which fit men for the station of judges, and as, on this account, there will be great reason to apprehend all the ill consequences of defective information, so, on account of the natural propensity of such bodies to party divisions, there will be no less fear that the pestilential breath of faction may poison the fountain of justice."

John Jay, the first chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, writing to Jefferson, covers the same ground thus:

"To vest legislative, judicial, and executive powers in one and the same body of men, and that in a body daily changing its members, can never be wise. In my opinion these three great departments of sovereignty should forever be separated, and so distributed as to serve as checks for each other."

Hamilton and Jay were writing of civil organization, and the church, dealing only with religious affairs, differs greatly. The spirit of faction, for instance, would have small influence in the General Conference, for politics and



financial influences that promote faction in civil government have small place in the law and legislature of the church.

But the limitations of the church legislature as a Supreme Court are the same as those in the national Legislature, for the members will "rarely be chosen with a view to those qualifications which fit men for the station of judges." These qualifications are, obviously, profound knowledge of the law, judicial experience, and the calm, judicial mind that weighs facts and law in the even balance of unbiased judgment. All of these qualities are essential to the judge in a Supreme Court, but the last is most highly essential, for the lack of it may make the others nugatory, while its presence may correct a lack in the others.

The General Conference when acting as a Supreme Court must inevitably suffer severely, for only a very small part of its members possess these Supreme Court qualifications. Lack of knowledge and experience, and those waves of sentiment, emotion, and sympathy, or antipathy and prejudice, which are certain at times to sweep over such a body, no matter how high its intelligence or character, will work their certain results, which at some points will be error in interpreting constitutional law. Such error is not necessarily a reflection upon either the intel-

ligence or character of the members. It only defines clearly the result when intelligent men and women, not prepared for its high functions, attempt to act as supreme court judges.

Lack of information, it should be carefully noted, easily leads to error, to serious error. The new law of annuity illustrates this. The General Conference voted that law undoubtedly with the kindest intent toward retired ministers. But the law will surely have to be repealed because it will work the most grievous and humiliating injustice. Of the fifty claimants in the Des Moines Conference at this writing, only two have served forty years. As under the new law no person who retires under sixty-five years of age can have an annuity unless he served forty years, this means that practically no person who retires under the fixed age can have an annuity. In the Des Moines Conference one man retired at sixty-six after serving ten years. He can have his annuity. Another man retired under sixty-five who had given eight years preparation in college and theological seminary and thirty-five years effective service, but he cannot have an annuity because he retired under sixty-five. Certainly, the General Conference never intended such deep injustice as that, and just as certainly the enactment of the law was due to lack of knowledge. When this lack of knowledge

leads to error in constitutional law, as it certainly did at the General Conference at Des Moines, the error may be very serious.

The General Conference acting as a Supreme Court has in the main done well because it has uniformly accepted the findings of its Judiciary Committee. This is the eminently safe procedure, for that committee is small, not so subject to the impulses that may sway the great assembly, and always includes a good number of learned and experienced jurists who guide and leaven its deliberations. The General Conference takes a great risk when it reverses the decision of the Judiciary Committee, for it is reasonably certain that nine-tenths of those who vote for reversal have not the preparation that would justify them so to vote. Persons of the highest intelligence and character may not be adapted to act as supreme judges.

A very serious difficulty is the lack of time. The United States Supreme Court gave two months to the eighteenth amendment, but the General Conference could not give three days to the doctrinal test. The Supreme Court brought in a unanimous decision, the General Conference a deeply divided opinion, and there is no doubt that division was due to lack of knowledge which it was impossible to supply in the debate. The information so greatly needed was entirely ir-

relevant to the legal decision, though highly necessary to prepare the minds of the delegates for a comprehensive view of the broad relations of the subject.

Every consideration concerning the wise and effective administration of the judicial procedure of the church leads directly to the principle stated by Hamilton and Jay, namely, the judicial should be separated from the legislative and executive powers of the church. A legislative assembly of eight hundred and fifty members cannot, under the well-known limitations of human nature, act wisely and efficiently as a supreme court, for that exalted work requires qualities no legislative assembly ever had.

This means that a Supreme Court should be organized for the church. The one presented in the report of the Commission on Unification was, with one exception, wisely and correctly organized. It ought not to be called a Judicial Council, but in harmony with Methodist nomenclature, the Supreme Judicial Conference.

The Committee on Unification committed the grave error of allowing an appeal on constitutional questions to the General Conference. A court from which there is an appeal is not a supreme court, and an appeal to the General Conference on constitutional questions is open to all the grave objections we have been discuss-

ing, and is, in fact, not materially different from the present system, it renews the fundamental error of the union of the legislative and judicial powers in one body.

The bishops, of course, could not be a Supreme Court to pass on their own rulings in the Conferences. A Supreme Judicial Conference that would command the confidence and respect of the church must be organized as nearly as possible after the model of the United States Supreme Court, that is, upon those principles which the judicial experience of the ages has demonstrated to be wisest and most effective. Modifications suitable to the peculiar work of the church should be employed, as that the bishops should nominate the members of the court and the General Conference elect them.

### IN CONCLUSION

The great success of the Centenary movement has given the church a very marked leadership among the churches. The Centenary stimulated and encouraged a far-reaching movement in other denominations that has produced great results.

But leadership always carries with it responsibility. The world may rightly look to the Methodist Episcopal Church for high teaching on any subject of interdenominational impor-

tance, and it is for the church a high responsibility that its teaching shall be true, and because true shall satisfy the needs of the public.

The doctrinal test leads directly to such an issue.

If a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church wishes to join the Presbyterian Church, that church will receive him into its membership on the basis of his Christian character as a Methodist, and he can carry with him into that church all his cherished Methodist beliefs, for the Presbyterian Church has no doctrinal test.

But if a Presbyterian wishes to join the Methodist Episcopal Church, that church will not receive him into its membership on the basis of his Christian character as a Presbyterian. In addition to that he must abandon all his cherished Presbyterian beliefs inconsistent with the Articles of Religion, he must abandon the right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures covered by the Articles of Religion, and he must believe what the General Conference directs him to believe, as defined by the Articles of Religion.

It does not seem possible that the most powerful mind in the Methodist Episcopal Church could stand before the Presbyterian General Assembly and convince that body that it is right to make our Article on Purgatory, and others

equally inapplicable and irrelevant, a test for admission into the church.

But neither can the doctrinal test be justified before the world, for it is certain that public opinion will approve, not our doctrinal test, but the Christian liberty of opinion which the Presbyterian General Assembly teaches and for which the Presbyterian Church stands.

Clearly, the Methodist Episcopal Church will assume the position worthy of its dignity, its history, and its leadership in Protestantism only when it can announce to the world that its only test for admission into its membership is the Master's test for admission into his church on earth, or to his church in heaven, "Ye must be born again," and "By their fruits ye shall know them," as he unfolded them himself, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." This is the Master's only test for admission into that city which "cometh down from God out of heaven."

It is true, but it is written with deep reluctance, that the doctrinal test is the most conspicuous example of denominational intolerance in the Protestant world. The significance of this statement is relieved by the fact that intolerance was not intended by it, only the

protection of the church from unsound doctrine. The good men who instituted the test failed to perceive its subtle and far-reaching implications.

Nevertheless, the startling fact remains that no member of a sister church can be received into the membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church on the basis of his Christian character and experience in that church. He can enter heaven on that basis, but not our church; the doctrinal test will stop him.

There will be no doctrinal test at the Pearly Gates.



## II

### ARGUMENT OF HENRY WADE ROGERS

#### AS MADE IN THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF 1920

I present the Report No. 6 of the Committee on Judiciary, which is found on page 350 of The Daily Christian Advocate. That case has brought about a majority and a minority report, the majority report being concurred in by fourteen, and the minority report by five. It involves the constitutionality of paragraph 514 in the Ritual which relates to the admission of members into the church. That paragraph deals with the admission of members into full membership. Paragraph 513 deals with the admission on probation. Paragraph 513 asks three questions. Paragraph 514 asks five questions.

The third question asked is this: "Do you believe in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church?" That question is challenged as having been enacted by the General Conference in excess of its powers. The General Conference of our church prior to 1812

had full legislative powers to do what they pleased, but the General Conference of 1808 created a delegated Conference to meet in 1812, and it was provided at that time that the General Conference should have full powers to establish rules and regulations for the church, subject to certain restrictions. Those restrictions were expressed in six Restrictive Rules, the fourth of which provided that the General Conference shall not revoke or change the Articles of Religion. You will find that provision in part 3 of our constitution, paragraph 46, article 10.

The General Rules in paragraph 29 provide that one condition only shall be previously required of those seeking admission into these societies—"a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." The claim is that when the General Conference authorized the question to be asked of candidates for admission whether they believed "in the doctrines of Holy Scripture as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church," they changed the provision of the General Rules which said that there shall be only one condition, that which I have quoted.

Now, this question arose in this way: The Appeal was made by W. H. Shipman, a member of the Des Moines Conference. He said in his Annual Conference that he had not asked the

third of these five questions which ministers are ordered to ask of candidates for admission. He stated to the bishop that his failure to ask that question was due to the fact that he did not believe it constitutional. And he asked for a ruling on that question. He was informed by the bishop that until that provision had been declared unconstitutional it was his duty to ask the question. Now, let me say, in the first place, that we have in the church a constitution. We must respect its obligations. We cannot treat it as though it were a scrap of paper to be observed when it suited our purpose and set aside when we considered it did not suit our purpose. There is only one question here in this appeal, only one question which the Judiciary Committee could consider or was asked to consider. That is the question as to whether the General Conference exceeded its powers or whether it did not. We are not concerned with anything else. And you are not. The same duty which rests upon the Judiciary Committee with reference to this question rests on you. Now, the constitution of our church is a small document. It covers only thirteen pages of the Discipline. It is divided into three parts. One deals with organization and government. Another deals with the General Rules. Another deals with the Articles of Religion. Before we dispose of this case, we have

got more or less to consider each one of these parts. The Judiciary Committee, in reaching the conclusion at which it arrived, did so upon the theory that paragraph 29, which stated that there is but one condition to be asked of those who desire to come into these societies, "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins," was imposed by the General Rules. And the constitution says that the General Conference shall not revoke or change the General Rules. The Judiciary Committee thinks the General Conference did change the General Rules, when in the place of this one condition it imposed another. Whether it imposed more than one other is immaterial now, for it is not involved in this Appeal. But we have certainly added another condition when we require the question to be asked, "Do you believe in the doctrine of Holy Scripture as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church?" The Judiciary Committee thinks that the language of the constitution is so plain that it is not necessary to have recourse to the writings of our theological forefathers in reference to this matter. But we do call attention to the fact that John Wesley in his writings clearly sets forth that he had no intention of imposing any other condition of membership on those who came into the Methodist societies.

We think that is very plainly evidenced by what he said. And let me remind you that these General Rules were written by him in 1784. May I also say that he wrote the Articles of Religion, about which I shall have something to say later. We also call attention to the fact that for eighty years after the church was organized no attempt was made to impose any other condition of membership than the one to which I have called attention, stated in paragraph 29. That fact is eloquent. It affords us evidence that the founders of the church understood the constitution in the sense in which we understand it. They did not undertake to impose any other doctrinal test. I am not now going to argue this case at this stage. I am simply stating an outline of the reasons which led the Judiciary Committee to its conclusion. The minority report challenges the correctness of our decision on three grounds; first, upon this ground, that that question in paragraph 29 was intended to be asked, not of those who come into the church in full membership, but simply of those who come in on probation. That is one point they make. The second point is that it cannot be unconstitutional to ask a question which implies faith in the constitution itself. They say the Articles of Religion are a part of the constitution, and it cannot be unconstitutional to insist that those

who come into the church should give their assent to the constitution. Their third objection is that our conclusion would be disastrous in the highest degree to this church, because it would open wide the doors so that Jews, Mohammedans, and pagans might come in. Those are their objections. I have stated to you what the majority report means, and the objections raised by the minority. I reserve the rest of my argument for the present.

*After others had spoken and in closing the debate Judge Rogers said :*

I did not present the argument at the opening of the discussion. I simply stated the issue, and said I would reserve my argument. This question is one of such vast importance to the church that it ought not to be decided until the argument has been made. I therefore hope that if I should need more than the allotted time, I may be granted it on this important question. I need not say to the lawyers in this body, that even in the Supreme Court of the United States cases are not infrequently decided by the vote of five judges for and four judges against. In my own court, the United States Circuit Court of Appeals, whose decisions are final on ninety-five per cent of the cases that come before it, cases are sometimes decided by two judges for and one

against. I call attention to the fact that all of the judges on this Judiciary Committee, seven or eight, are unanimous in their decision on the question of law.

A Delegate: Judge Lynch dissented.

Henry Wade Rogers: Well, there may be one. Then there are seven for, and one against. I want to say also that before this Appeal was brought, the man who brought it submitted the whole question to a former chief justice of the Supreme Court of Iowa, and received the opinion that the provision was unconstitutional. He then went to the present chief justice of that court, a Methodist, and submitted the question to him, and was again told that the provision was unconstitutional. He then went to the attorney-general of Iowa, and submitted the question to him, and was again told that it was unconstitutional. You may think that the lawyers and judges are on one side and the ministers on the other. There are four ministers in this committee and two of them support the majority and two of them the minority. I think it is fair to say that there was no abler ecclesiastical jurist in our church for many years than Bishop Smith. He held that this provision was unconstitutional.

Then there was Bishop Luccock, with whom I sat in the Judiciary Committee in Minneapolis.

He investigated it from every point of view, and came to the conclusion that the provision was unconstitutional. Several years ago the appellant wrote a letter to Dr. Buckley, the author of "The Constitutional History of Methodism," and asked his opinion as to whether this provision was constitutional or not.

Dr. Buckley took that letter and came into my chambers in New York, and we sat and talked that question over for two hours. He was still in full possession of all his powers. He went home and wrote a letter to Mr. Shipman (and that letter is still in existence), in which he said he had been to New York and talked the matter over, and that he and I had both come to the conclusion that the provision was unconstitutional. Now, you may give to that such weight as you choose, but I want you to understand that this conclusion is not simply that of a judge standing upon a technicality. The leading thinkers and ecclesiastical jurists of the church have taken this position. I rest this majority opinion on this proposition, that the constitution of our church says that the General Rules shall not be changed by the General Conference, that the General Rules from 1784 to this hour contain the statement that there is only one condition to be exacted of those seeking admission; and that this paragraph



which is challenged undertakes to change a provision which has been in the General Rules since 1784. I submit that that cannot be done.

A good deal has been said about our constitution. Suppose that I grant, for the purposes of this argument, that until 1901, when this constitution was adopted and put into the Discipline, this General Conference could have lawfully adopted paragraph 514, the one that is challenged. The constitution of 1901 said, "The General Conference shall not change the General Rules." The General Rules contain that one condition. What of it? Just this, that if paragraph 514 was valid in 1901, it became absolutely invalid when this new constitution was adopted. Suppose the State of Iowa or any other State in the Union had a provision, in its constitution even, making lawful the sale of intoxicating liquors and the manufacture of the same. When the eighteenth amendment was put into the constitution of the United States it nullified every provision in a State constitution or statute which made the sale of liquor lawful. So I say that if the provision of 1864 was lawful when the General Conference put it into the Discipline, it became unlawful the moment the constitution of 1901 was adopted.

Now, further, it is said that that provision in the constitution relates to preparatory member-

ship. That is a very extraordinary statement to make. If it relates to preparatory membership, how do you know it does? The words "preparatory membership" are not to be found in the constitution. You may search it, but you will search it in vain to find any such words as "preparatory membership" in the constitution.

The Bishop: The motion is that the time be extended. The motion is on the extension of time in order that Judge Rogers may complete the summing up for the report of the majority of the committee. Those of you who will so extend the time raise your hands. Those opposed. The time is extended.

Henry Wade Rogers: I want to ask this General Conference this question when it comes to pass upon the question whether that condition is one which should apply simply to preparatory membership. Wouldn't it be a strange thing for the framers of a constitution to do, to put into it a provision like that, which they intended to apply only to one class of members, and not say that they were applying it to that class of members? How do you know that they meant to apply it simply to probationers? They say, "No member." Somebody says by inference they meant probationary members. They never said so. Again, Porter's Compendium of Methodism has been cited by

the minority. Porter's Compendium of Methodism—speaking of preparatory members—the writer says, "They are not members; they are candidates for membership." They are not members. You could not put them on trial. A member of the Methodist Church is entitled to be tried. You could not try one who is simply a candidate for membership. And I say, moreover, with reference to these preparatory members, that it would be a strange thing not to say expressly that the doctrine was to be confined to preparatory membership if that is what they meant.

George W. White: I simply want to say that Judge Rogers has been so fair in all this discussion that I am sure he would allow me to correct the statement he has just made, because Porter's Statement is as follows:

"If after this term of probation they have been baptized, and on examination it appears that they are Methodists in faith and are disposed to observe the rules of the church, they are admitted to full membership. In being received on trial they profess 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come.' They do not say they are Methodists and believe our doctrine and Discipline, but having been received into full connection they stand in quite a different relation. They now profess to believe both our

doctrine and Discipline, and are governed by them."

I admit that Porter uses the language that they do not say they are Methodists. It was not that they are not members.

Henry Wade Rogers: I was not referring to that paragraph. I thought I had the page of the book. I still say that Porter says "they are candidates for membership," and uses those words expressly, and goes on to say that the probationer cannot be placed on trial, because he is not a member.

Now, one thing more. Speaking as to the intent, what did John Wesley mean when he framed the General Rules in 1743? I can judge something of his intent from what the Methodist Church in England has done on this question, and what the Methodist Church in Ireland has done on this question. The only condition of membership in the Irish Methodist Church from the time it was founded until this hour has been based upon that one condition; and the only condition of membership in the English Wesleyan Methodist Church from the hour it was founded to this hour has been based on that one condition. John Wesley's intentions are expressed in the statement which we have copied in the majority report, and which I cannot read, for there is no time.

Now, I come to deal with the other proposition which has been advanced here, which is that because the Articles of Religion are in the constitution of the church, it must be constitutional to ask any member who comes into the church to assent and assert his belief in the articles he incorporated in the constitution. I venture to say that if such a constitutional argument as that should be advanced in any court in America, the man who advanced it would not be patiently listened to for five minutes.

Let me put a case which will illustrate what I mean. Suppose the constitution of the United States should say that persons coming to this country from a foreign country should be admitted as citizens upon two conditions, one that they took an oath of allegiance to the government of the United States, and one that they took an oath renouncing their allegiance to the government from which they came; that is all the constitution says; then Congress years afterward—eighty years or a hundred years afterward, if you please—comes along and enacts a statute and says that no one shall be naturalized, brought into membership, made a citizen, unless he swears that he believes in the righteousness of the doctrine of the thirteenth amendment, which abolished slavery, and unless he believes in the fifteenth amend-

ment, in the righteousness of it, if you please, which conferred the right to vote upon men without regard to race, color, or previous condition of servitude; and then they would require him to say that he believed in the righteousness of the eighteenth amendment. They are all in the constitution, too. Do you suppose—does anybody suppose that if the constitutionality of that piece of legislation by Congress was challenged, any lawyer would stand up in court and pretend to argue to the court that that legislation by Congress was constitutional because all it asked was that the man, to be admitted into American citizenship, should swear that he believed in the thirteenth and fifteenth and eighteenth amendments? There isn't a lawyer in this body who does not know that no lawyer would advance an argument like that. And if there is nothing in that argument, you are not governed by the theory that we have got the constitutional power to ask a man, when he comes into membership in the Methodist Church, whether he believes in the doctrines of Holy Scripture as they are expounded in the Articles of Religion. The two things are exactly analogous.

One thing more. Let me just read a passage from John Wesley's Diary:

John Wesley in his Journal, Vol. 1, page 90,

said, "After two months' trial, if no objection appears, they are received into membership." Who does not see that they are asked no other question? That reminds me, I want to come back for just one moment, because we have laid so much stress on this matter that the question relates to those who are applying for preparatory membership. May I ask you, isn't it curious that in a constitution for the church, if they meant simply that this test should be applied to candidates for preparatory membership, they should be so particular in reference to asking that question of those who are seeking preparatory membership for two months only, and lay down no test for those who are coming in there for life. Curious! Wouldn't it be? Very extraordinary, it seems to me. Now, about this disastrous result which is going to follow if we declare this action unconstitutional.

I want to say, in reference to that, two things. In the first place, if it were unfortunate for this General Conference to declare this act unconstitutional, that has nothing to do with the question which we are asked to decide. We are asked to decide the legal question as to whether the General Conference had the power or did not have the power. The second thing I want to say in answer to it is this, that it seems to me to be far afield to say that disastrous results are

to follow from such action. Disastrous results? They have not followed in England or Ireland, and they have had simply that one condition. You speak about the Articles of Religion; and I want to say this, from Wheeler's Exposition of the Twenty-five Articles. It may be information to some of you. These Articles of Religion which are in our constitution were drawn up by John Wesley in 1784; all of them except the twenty-third, which he did not draw. Do you think he intended that belief in them should be a test for membership in the church? The Articles of Religion, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, of the English Church, the Anglican Church, framed about 1550 or 1560, have never been a test of membership even in the Anglican Church. We have undertaken by the legislation of 1864 to make them a test of membership in our church. They have never been a test of membership even in the Anglican Church. Listen to what Wheeler says: "Assent or subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles is imposed upon all who seek orders in the Anglican Church, but not upon the laity." We have gone further than the Anglican Church. We have gone further than the English Methodist Church, and further than the Irish Church. No disaster has attended any one of them. Don't let us be disturbed by that consideration.



Now I come back to the proposition with which we started. I hope this Conference, when it comes to a vote on this question, will consider simply the legal question. We cannot afford to make our constitution a scrap of paper. We cannot afford to say that it has no abiding force, and that when it seems to us to be in our interest to disregard it we may do so, and when it seems to be in our interest to keep it we will keep it. That would be a most unfortunate position for a nation. It would be much more so for the Church of God.

### III

#### DISCUSSION BY GEORGE W. WHITE

#### THE RITUAL FOR THE RECEPTION OF MEMBERS IS CONSTITUTIONAL

##### THE ISSUE STATED

AN Appeal from a ruling in the Des Moines Conference was referred to the Committee on Judiciary at the General Conference of 1920. The Appeal was based on the claim that as paragraph 29 of the Discipline, under the heading of the General Rules, states that "There is only one condition previously required of those who seek admission into these societies, namely, 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins' "; and, furthermore, that as the General Rules were first adopted by Wesley's original Methodist Societies, and then incorporated into the constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church at its organization; and, that as the Restrictive Rules, enacted by the General Conference of 1808, forbade the General Conference to "revoke or change the General Rules of the United Societies," therefore, it was unconstitutional for the General Conference of 1864 to adopt, and require the pastors to use, the

form of Ritual now in paragraph 527, which asks candidates for full membership to profess faith in "The doctrines of Holy Scripture as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church."<sup>1</sup>

A large majority of the Judiciary Committee supported the Appeal, but the minority dissented so strongly that it was agreed to present two reports to the General Conference. After the most extensive debate of the entire session, the minority report was sustained, thus upholding the constitutionality of the Ritual in question.

While the issue is primarily one of law, it is necessarily also one of history, for the law must be interpreted in the light of the meaning given to it, and the use made of it, by those who enacted it. *A mere technical interpretation of it will not at all meet the case.* These facts were recognized in all the discussions both in the Judiciary Committee and also in the General Conference.

The regulations stated in paragraph 29 were first employed in the societies organized by Wesley in England, and afterward by those which sprang up in America, out of which the Methodist Episcopal Church was later organized; hence a right interpretation involves a study of those early societies, and of the force

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 514 in 1916 Discipline.

they gave to the "one condition" named as "previously" required of those seeking admission.

It must also be clearly borne in mind that the constitutionality of the Ritual form in paragraph 514, attacked in the Appeal, is not a question of the wisdom or desirability of the doctrinal statements set forth in the Articles of Religion to which assent is asked, nor of their adaptability to the minds of children, or youth, or to others, but it is a question as to whether the church has a constitutional *right*, under the provisions of paragraph 29, to propose *any* tests for membership other than the simple "one condition" named in that paragraph. The Appeal denies this right to the church. Under the commanding position assigned to paragraph 29 by the Appeal and its supporters, it would be unconstitutional for the church to require applicants for membership to submit to baptism, either with or without the Ritual which requires, among other things, assent to the Apostles' Creed, before being received.

It would not permit the church to even ask assurance from the candidates for membership whether they had *found* escape "from the wrath to come, and salvation from their sins," since the "one condition" named in paragraph 29 only stipulates that they shall "desire" these things.

It does not even require that they shall be expressed, or confessed, or attained.

Indeed, since the Appeal and its supporters contend that this paragraph governs admission into the church in every form and degree, a system of membership on trial, or probation, would be also unconstitutional, and no instruction, doctrinally, in preparation for admission into membership, would be permissible, for the prohibitions of paragraph 29 would be as absolute against teachings asked to be accepted privately as against those to be assented to publicly. Hence the church would be in the strange position of asking concurrence in doctrines, *after* people had been admitted to membership, of which it had not, in fairness, apprised them before admission.

With all these serious implications, besides others which are incidental, the great importance of the question at issue can be seen at a glance. It challenges many of the most important and distinctive practices of our church, which it has followed from the beginning of its history, and hence it is the contention of those who supported the minority report that the interpretation given by the Appeal and its supporters to the provision of paragraph 29 is a gross exaggeration of the meaning and force which the founders of our church intended it to

have; and that to now assign it such a commanding position in our economy, would be to overthrow the intentions of the founders of our church by a *technical* interpretation of the law which those who enacted it never contemplated. *This, itself, would be clearly unconstitutional.* To the support of these contentions this article will be devoted.

#### THE ARGUMENT

This writer, who was given the duty of preparing and presenting the minority report at the General Conference, after a far more careful study, from original sources, of the whole question, than was possible at that time, is now more firmly convinced than ever that the position taken in that report is entirely correct, fully justified by the unquestionable facts of our history as a church.

It will be the purpose of this article to present these evidences of the constitutionality of the present practice of the church in the use of the Ritual in paragraph 527, in support of the following propositions:

*First:* That Wesley's societies in England and America were not churches, nor intended to be, but mere voluntary religious associations formed *within* the Church of England, purely for spiritual culture and to raise the religious tone

of that church; hence the regulations governing them have little, if any, bearing on the constitutionality of methods adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was organized out of the societies in America.

*Second:* That Wesley's much-heralded liberality as to theological "opinion," which has been so much relied on in the discussion of this question, arose out of the character of his societies, only, and did *not* express his estimate of the value of creeds for regularly organized churches as ecclesiastical institutions; and hence this liberality, which has been greatly overstated, has no bearing on the question at issue.

*Third:* That the "one condition" of membership stated in paragraph 29 is not a part of the General Rules proper, hence is not included in the provisions of the Fourth Restrictive Rule, upon which the plea of unconstitutionality of the use of the Ritual in paragraph 527 is mainly based.

*Fourth:* That the "one condition" contained in paragraph 29 was never used either in the societies or in our church, except for admission "on trial," as Wesley called it, or "on probation," as we have called it; and that it is given in our church just the same position it has held from the first use made of it, hence its present use is not unconstitutional, and the use of other

methods of receiving members into *full connection* is constitutional.

*Fifth:* That Wesley, himself, at the organization of our church, proposed, and the founders of our church adopted, methods of receiving people into full membership after they had been admitted on trial by the "one condition," which prove that neither he nor they considered the "one condition" as governing reception into full membership. If it does not govern this, then the present practice of the church cannot be unconstitutional.

*Sixth:* That the *continuous practice* of our church from the beginning until now, of having separate methods of receiving people upon trial and into full membership, together with the confirmation of this practice by a long line of writers on the Discipline, has established the method followed in our Ritual as the constitutional rule of our church, if there were nothing else to prove it.

*Seventh:* That the fact of our church having adopted at its organization and placed in its constitution, on the recommendation of Mr. Wesley himself, Articles of Religion, when he had not given them to his own societies, is proof positive that both he and the founders of our church understood that our church, with its creed and ecclesiastical organization, was on an



entirely different basis from the societies, and that practices which had not been called for in the societies, respecting membership, were not only allowable but necessary in the new church. Article XXII particularly empowers the church to "ordain, change, or abolish" rites and ceremonies as it may wish; hence gives direct authority for the Ritual used in paragraph 527, which, therefore, cannot be unconstitutional.

These propositions will be discussed in the order above given without so fully stating them again.

*First: The Peculiar Nature of Wesley's Societies*

All records agree that Wesley had not, at first, the remotest idea or plan of organizing a church. He merely organized a religious society within the Church of England for the purpose of reviving true religion among its communicants. In the very first Minutes of his Conferences, that of 1744, appear the following question and answer:

"Q. 3. What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists?

"A. *Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land*" (Works, Vol. V, p. 212). Of Wesley's early so-

ciety the New History of Methodism, page 284, says, "It was composed of members of the Church of England. Such as disowned themselves members of that church were discontinued from membership in the society." Nor were his the first, or the only, societies of this kind appearing about that time. The Moravian Societies, with which Wesley first affiliated, are, of course, well known, for it was in them that he experienced his new spiritual birth. Within three weeks after this experience he journeyed to Germany to visit the headquarters of the Moravian movement to study the plan of their work. These societies had not separated from the State Church of Germany. Wesley patterned his own societies very closely after these at first. But there were only a very few of the Moravian societies in England. There had been, however, a large movement going on in England for over a half century before the Wesleys commenced their distinctive work, along similar lines, of the organization of religious societies *within* the Church of England, for the purpose of reforming the church and keeping alive vital piety in the Kingdom, as a result of the Puritan movement. In these societies the Wesleys often preached before their own societies were launched. Watson in his Life of Wesley, 1831, page 67, says: "The 'societies' which Mr. Wesley

mentions in his Journals as visited by him for the purpose of expounding the Scriptures, in London and Bristol, were the remains of those which Dr. Woodward describes, in an account first published in 1698 or 1699. They began about the year 1667, among a few young men in London, who, under Hornbeck's preaching, and the morning lectures in Cornhill, were brought, says Dr. Woodward, 'to a very affecting sense of their sins, and began to apply themselves in a very serious way to religious thoughts and purposes.' They were advised by their ministers to meet together weekly for 'good discourse,' and rules were adopted 'for the better regulation of these meetings.' They contributed weekly for the use of the poor, and stewards were appointed to take care of and to disburse their charities. When Dr. Woodward wrote his account there were about forty of these societies in activity (in London), a few in the country, and nine in Ireland. By their rules they were obliged, at their weekly meetings, to discourse only on such subjects as tended to practical holiness, and *to avoid all controversy*; and beside relieving the poor they were to promote schools and the 'catechising of young and ignorant persons in their respective families.'

"These societies certainly opened a favorable prospect for the revival of religion in the Church

of England. . . They appear to have declined from about 1710; and although several societies remained still in London, Bristol, and a few other places at the time when Mr. Wesley commenced his labors, they were not in a state of growth and activity. They had, however, been the means of keeping the spark of piety from entire extinction. The sixth edition of Dr. Woodward's account of these societies was published in 1744; but from that time we hear no more of them; they either gradually died away or were absorbed in the Methodist Societies."

Here, according to this high authority, we find a movement very similar to that of early Methodism, and for a time running contemporary with it, of which not only did the Wesleys have full knowledge, but with which they for a time actively cooperated. It is noticeable that the societies, in both cases, were formed on a similar pattern—indeed almost identical—and for the same purpose, namely, to reform the Church of England. Historian Green links the Methodist movement with that of the Puritans, through these societies.

That recent great work, *The New History of Methodism*, bears similar testimony. Speaking of Wesley's work, it says: "Like Spener (1635-1705), he wished to reform the Established

Church by forming religious societies within it" (Vol. I, p. 281). At the close of the seventeenth century, under a resistless quickening of the Spirit of God, a few people in various localities realized a sense of their obligation as to the souls of men, and they began to meet and form societies. . . . This feeling manifested itself in a movement which greatly resembled the Young Men's Christian Associations of our day" (Vol. I, p. 132).

Tyerman also (Life and Times of Wesley, Vol. 1, p. 254) strongly confirms this testimony. He says: "We must now return to Wesley at Bristol. Every night he expounded to societies. These were small gatherings of religious people, which had continued for godly purposes for about the last fifty years: for it is important to remember that the 'Religious Societies' formed in the days of Dr. Hornbeck, previous to the abdication of King James, and again revived in the reign of Queen Mary, were not confined to London and Westminster, but existed in different towns throughout the kingdom, and all acting substantially according to the same rules and regulations. They met to pray, sing psalms, and read the Scriptures together, and to reprove, exhort, and edify one another by religious conference. Such were the 'Religious Societies' which existed for more than half a century be-

fore the formation of the 'United Societies' of the people called Methodists, and in whose rooms and meetings in London and Bristol, and elsewhere, Whitefield and the Wesley brothers, for a few years, were accustomed to read and explain the Scriptures almost every night."

These citations are exceedingly important in connection with the constitutional question now under discussion. They show conclusively that the Methodist movement was, at first, only part of an older and larger movement for the reform of the Church of England resulting from Puritanism, which had been in progress for more than a half century before; hence there was no occasion for an ecclesiastical plan of organization, with creeds, and sacraments, etc., because the whole movement was *within* the Church of England, like the others had been, and had no design of separating from it.

Wesley, himself, bore abundant testimony to this fact. His definition of his "United Society" shows it to be only a duplication of those which had gone before. He says that in 1739 a few people came to him in London, asking advice as to how they might "flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads." A time was set for the first meeting, others of a similar state of mind were invited, and stated meetings were arranged. Wesley

says: "This was the rise of the United Society. Such a society is no other than a 'company of men, having the form and seeking the power of godliness,' united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other work out their salvation" (Works, Vol. V, p. 190). The objects of this society were identical, it will be seen, with those preceding it. There was no one thing which Wesley so frequently reiterated in his writings as that he had no wish or plan to form a new church or to separate from the Church of England. He wrote no less than four or five special papers on the subject (see Works, Vol. VII); he put emphatic disclaimers into at least three or four sermons; he asserted it innumerable times in debates on paper, with those who attacked him as causing a schism in the Established Church; and he inserted it repeatedly in the Minutes of his Conferences. A good sample is furnished in the Larger Minutes, evidently dating *after* he had reluctantly consented to the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, because of the Revolutionary War:

"Are we not, little by little, sliding into a separation from the church? O, use every means to prevent this! Exhort all our people to keep close to the church and sacraments. Warn them

against despising the prayers of the church; against calling our society 'the church'; against calling our preachers 'ministers'; our houses 'meeting houses': call them plain preaching houses or chapels. Do not license them as Dissenters. But are we not Dissenters? No; although we frequently use extemporaneous prayer, and call sinners to repentance in all places of God's dominion, *and unite in a religious society*, yet we are not Dissenters in the only sense which the law recognizes, namely, those who renounce the services of the church. We do not, we dare not separate from it. We are not seceders nor do we bear any resemblance to them. *What they do in America, or what their Minutes say on this subject, is nothing to us. We will keep in the good old way*" (Works, Vol. V, page 227; italics ours). It is generally agreed by Methodist writers that this entry was placed in the Minutes of the English Methodists *subsequent* to the Conference of 1789 of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, in which some very scathing sentiments regarding the Church of England and its branch in America were recorded as a justification for the organization of our church, and that the words quoted above were a part of Wesley's reply, defending the course of the Methodists in England in *not* separating from the church. This was,



then, his position within a year or two of his death. It is well known that there was no separation from the Church by the English Methodists until some time after Wesley's death.

Watson records (*Life of Wesley*, p. 198) that in 1769 Wesley read a paper to the Conference binding the preachers together by a closer tie than before, to continue as they were until after his death, at which event they were to choose a committee to exercise the authority which had been his. This was later superseded by the famous "Deed of Declaration." Telfer's *Life of Wesley*, page 308, states that Wesley designated certain churches of the Church of England to be the parish churches for the Methodists, notably in Bristol, Saint James' Church, and in London, Saint Luke's, to which latter church the members of the society at the Foundry were to go, and even the society at City Road Chapel, as late as 1789.

Wesley long hoped that there might eventually come a recognition of Methodism by the Established Church, as a part of its own work. After the Conference of 1747, for over a year there were no societies formed, in the hope that this merger would take place. But this hope was not realized, and the work of organizing societies was resumed. Wesley gives the reason as fol-

lows: "We have preached for more than a year, now, without forming societies, and almost all the seed has fallen by the wayside" (Hyde, *Story of Methodism*, p. 156). It was because Wesley's societies were not regarded by him as churches that he felt it proper to exercise almost complete authority over them, in a way that no regularly organized church would for a moment permit. He regarded the Methodists as his *personal following* (Works, Vol. VII, p. 305). "On neither side of the ocean had adherents of Wesley hitherto (1784) organized as a church. They were simply, up to this time, nonecclesiastical religious societies, entirely voluntary on the part of the members, and all governed by a common discipline of which their founder was sole dictator and chief executor" (Article, "Methodism," McClintock and Strong, p. 153).

When Wesley was severely criticized for his assumption of dictatorship over his societies and preachers, he defended himself on the ground that both people and preachers had voluntarily placed themselves under his authority and direction, hence he had the right to dictate who should be received, who expelled, and under what rules they should live or work. He would not even permit anything of importance to be decided by votes in the Conferences. "But some of our preachers say, 'This is shackling free

Englishmen,' and demand a free Conference, that is, a meeting of all the preachers where all things shall be determined by the most votes. I answer, It is possible, after my death, something of this kind may take place, but not while I live. . . . It is nonsense to call my using this power 'shackling free Englishmen.' None needs to submit to it unless he will. Every preacher and every member may leave me when he pleases. But while he stays it is on the same terms that he joined me at first" (Larger Minutes, Works, Vol. V, pp. 220, 221). In this same section he goes on to say further, speaking of this personal power: "What is that power? *It is a power of admitting into, and excluding from, the societies under my care; of choosing and removing stewards; of receiving or not receiving helpers (preachers); of appointing them when, where and how to help me, and of desiring them to confer with me when I see good, to advise me, not to govern me; and it was merely in obedience to the providence of God and for the good of the people, that I at first accepted this power which I never sought. It is on the same condition that I use it to this day*" (italics ours).

It is absolutely clear from these statements of Wesley himself, that his societies were not churches at all, but voluntary organizations owning him as their personal leader, and vesting

in him all authority, just as he claimed. While he made some rules for their guidance, he was supreme above all the rules, and made his own private judgment outweigh everything else both in receiving, continuing, and expelling members, so long as he could deal with them personally, and afterward by men who were personally responsible to him and not to the societies. This accounts for the peculiar terms employed for these workers. They were "assistants," and "helpers," *to him*, instead of pastors responsible to their congregations or to an ecclesiastical organization. He called them his "sons in the gospel," and demanded absolute obedience to his orders.

That the organizers of the Methodist Episcopal Church understood this fact clearly, and also the radically different basis upon which the newly organized church was to stand, is made perfectly plain by the records which they themselves made at the time.

Jesse Lee, in his History, quoted in Methodist Charters and Constitutions, page 11, says: "Being now formed into a church, a regular plan of proceeding was laid, and a form of discipline drawn up. . . . *This being the beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, it will be necessary to take particular notice of those regulations or rules which were formed at that time, *especially*

*such as had not been previously practiced by us*" (italics ours). In return for Wesley's consent, though given reluctantly, to the organization of the church as separate both from him and from the Church of England, they voted, in order to preserve a united relation with the Methodists in England, and to express their great veneration for Mr. Wesley personally, that "During the life of Mr. Wesley we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the gospel, ready, in matters of church government, to obey his commands. And we do engage, after his death, to do everything consistent with the cause of religion in America, to preserve and promote our union with the Methodists of Europe."

Although this action was rescinded two years later (Sherman's History of the Discipline, pp. 25, 26), two years *before* Mr. Wesley's death, it shows plainly the *personal* character of Wesley's government of his societies, and that although the new church undertook to continue that plan of government for a while, out of honor to him, it was found soon to be impracticable and was promptly abandoned. Nothing could more clearly show that the new church was to be on an entirely different basis from the earlier Methodist societies, and that new rules had to be framed for its government.

William Watters was our first Methodist itin-

erant in America, and was a member of the Christmas Conference which organized our church. He wrote: "On the 25th of December, 1784, our Conference met in Baltimore, to consider the plan of church government recommended by Mr. Wesley. It was adopted and unanimously agreed to with great satisfaction, and we became, instead of a religious society, a separate church, under the name of the Methodist Episcopal Church. . . The Methodists in England and America formerly did not call themselves *a particular church*, but a religious society in connection with different churches, but mostly with the Episcopal Church" (Methodist Charters and Constitutions, pp. 13, 15).

Surely, it is not necessary to multiply quotations further, though many more could easily be given, to prove that the early Methodist societies were so far from being a regularly organized church that their regulations have very little, if any, bearing as precedents governing the practice of the Methodist Episcopal Church, later organized out of those in America, except as the founders of our church incorporated some of these practices into the constitution of the church. To what extent this was done will be shown in another section of this article.

*Second: Wesley's So-called Liberality Regarding  
Theological "Opinions"*

This matter, of which so much has been made in the discussions of the constitutional question at issue, is very closely connected with the character of Wesley's societies, disclosed in the preceding section. It has been assumed by those supporting the Appeal that Wesley's utterances regarding the liberality shown in admitting members to his societies had reference to comparisons between his societies and the regularly organized churches, whereas, in fact, he was making the comparisons usually between his own and other *societies*, of which there had been a large number in existence, as fully shown above. The very language quoted from Wesley by Abel Stevens and the friends of the Appeal, confirms this view: "Is there any other society in Great Britain or Ireland, that is so remote from bigotry? That is so truly of a catholic spirit? So ready to admit *all serious persons* [italics ours] without distinction? Where is there such another society in Europe? Or in the habitable world? I know of none." What is he talking about? Churches? No; *societies*. Since the members of his societies were already members of churches, as a rule, having their own creeds, there was no occasion to make doctrinal conditions of admission to his societies, since he

was not setting up a church. In his sermon on "The Ministerial Office" (Works, Vol. II, p. 544), Wesley gives precisely this interpretation to the liberal attitude of his societies. He says: "But whether ye will hear, or whether ye will forbear, we, by the grace of God, hold on our way, being ourselves still members of the Church of England, as we were from the beginning, but receiving all that love God, in every church, as our brother, and sister, and mother.

"And in order to their union with us we require no unity of opinions, or in modes of worship, but barely that they '*Fear God and work righteousness.*' Now, this is utterly a new thing, unheard of in any other Christian community. In what church or congregation beside, throughout the Christian world, can members be admitted upon these terms, without any other conditions? I know of none, in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America. This is the glory of the Methodists, and of them alone. *They are themselves no particular party or sect* [italics ours], but they receive those of all parties who 'endeavor to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.' "

Again, in same sermon, same page: "Ye are a new phenomenon in the earth, a body of people who, *being of no sect or party*, are friends to all parties, and endeavor to forward all in heart-



religion, in the knowledge and love of God and man. Ye yourselves were at first called in the Church of England, and though ye have and will have, a thousand temptations to leave it, and set up for yourselves, regard them not; be Church of England men still; do not cast away the peculiar glory which God hath put upon us, and frustrate the design of Providence, the very end for which he raised you up."

Again (*Ibid.*, p. 541): "They were members of the Church of England, and had no design of separating from it. And they advised all that were of it, to continue therein although they joined the Methodist societies; for *this did not imply leaving their former congregations, but only leaving their sins* [italics ours]. The Churchman might go to church still; the Presbyterian, Anabaptist, Quaker, might still retain their own opinions and attend their own congregations. The having a desire to flee from the wrath to come was the only condition required of them, therefore whosoever 'feared God and worked righteousness' was *qualified* for this society" [italics ours].

This sermon was preached at Cork, Ireland, in 1789, only two years, before Wesley's death, so it must be accepted as his views at the end of his great work. Several points are made particularly plain in this sermon, all bearing on the

explanation of his liberality as to theological "opinions."

a. That the most of Wesley's adherents were members of the Church of England and continued such after joining the Methodist societies, and were earnestly exhorted so to do, and to continue to attend worship there.

b. That people who belonged to other churches than the Church of England still retained their membership in those churches after joining the Methodist societies, and attended the services of those churches.

c. That people from all these different churches were expected to retain the creeds which they had been taught; since

d. It was not the plan of the Methodists to form a new sect or party or church, and hence did not need to frame any new creed for their acceptance.

e. That the "desire to flee from the wrath to come" was not a rule or regulation, but a *qualification of eligibility* to membership in the societies, and which was equally well stated in the expressions, "Endeavor to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God"; and those who "Feared God and worked righteousness." These formulas were used interchangeably in the sermon, repeatedly.

f. That the entire purpose of these societies

was to inculcate a heart-knowledge of God and his love, or the *experience* of religion, wholly apart from any thought of an ecclesiastical or church organization. Hence there was no occasion for anything but liberality toward theological "opinions."

However, it must not be assumed that Wesley was indifferent to right theological opinion. This would be a grave error. It is very easy to overdraw the picture of his liberalism, in a way which the facts do not warrant. While he made no doctrinal requirements for admission into his societies on trial, for the very sufficient reason that he was not organizing a church, but was establishing an agency for the revival of true religion in all the churches, especially in the Church of England, he was exceedingly tenacious of the kind of doctrinal teaching which he believed would produce the kind of religious character he wished to promote.

He was almost savage in his denunciation of any teachings which he believed were prejudicial to the spiritual development of the people in his societies. Although he had found his own spiritual awakening among the Moravians, and took his first followers into their societies, he soon broke with them, *entirely upon doctrinal grounds*, and denounced them bitterly for their errors. In his final, dramatic parting with them,

he hurled these charges at them: "I believe these assertions to be flatly contrary to the Word of God. I have warned you hereof again and again, and besought you to turn back to the law and to the testimony. I have borne with you long, hoping you would turn. But as I find you more and more confirmed in the error of your ways, nothing now remains but that I should give you up to God. You that are of the same judgment, follow me." And with these words he left them, about twenty people following him. With these he began to form a separate society (Works, Vol. III, pp. 190, 191). Even after he separated from the Moravians, he did not leave them alone, but attacked their teachings, by printed articles, by his sermons, and by entries in the Minutes of his Conferences.

In much the same way he separated from his bosom friend and colaborer, George Whitefield, *again entirely on doctrinal grounds*. The contention with Whitefield on Calvinism became so bitter that it resulted in a permanent division of the Methodists of England, and it even spread to America. An entry in the Larger Minutes gives a sample of the character of this controversy (Works, Vol. V, p. 238): Ques. 74. "What is the direct antidote to Methodism, the doctrine of heart-holiness?" Ans. "Calvinism; all the devices of Satan, for these fifty years, have done

far less toward stopping this work of God than that single doctrine." Ques. 76. "What can be done to guard against it?" Ans. Among some six or seven points are the following: "Very frequently, both in public and private, advise our people not to hear them; make it a matter of constant and earnest prayer that God would stop the plague." This does not sound much as though Wesley did not care what kind of theological opinions his people held.

Indeed, the Minutes of his Conferences, from the very first, are full of theological discussions, wherein he held his preachers, with a grip of iron, to the doctrines which he wished them to preach. And he was constantly in controversy with somebody, by correspondence, or by printed page, or by sermon and address, over his theological doctrines. A strange fact is that a large part of this controversy has been preserved in his Works, for he was a voluminous writer. It is doubtful if any religious leader ever had such constant and severe conflicts over doctrinal matters as did Wesley, in spite of his oft-quoted claims of liberality toward "opinions." The fact is, from the evidence, that he made these statements about liberality rather carelessly, and in the criticism which they evoked, he was compelled to modify his claims. Let one instance, of many which could be given, suffice to illustrate this.

In his Plain Account of the People Called Methodists (Works, Vol. V, p. 176) occurs this statement: "The points we chiefly insisted upon are four: First, that orthodoxy, or right opinions, is, at best, but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all," etc. This statement was soon very seriously challenged. A bishop in the Church of England replied that if this position were correct, it would make no difference whether people believed the "fundamental errors of Popery with the whole train of their abominations and idolatries." Wesley's answer was not very convincing (Works, Vol. V, p. 402).

Dr. Erskine, an eminent Scotch preacher, also attacked Wesley on this same statement. He said, "If once men believe that right opinion is a slender part of religion, if any part at all, there is scarce anything so foolish or so wicked which Satan may not prompt to." Wesley's reply was lame and evasive. He tried to modify his statement by adding the qualifying clause, "In some cases," just as he hedged in his reply to the bishop by changing his first statement, as given above, to "*in a truly righteous man* right opinions are a very slender part of religion," etc., "and that *in an irreligious, a profane man*, they are not any part of religion at all." The italicized words were the modifying ones. Again, later, he

gave a still different version of it by way of explanation. He said, referring to the original statement, "And this I explained thus: *In a child of God* right opinion is but a slender part of religion; it is no part at all in a *child of the devil*" (Works, Vol. VII, p. 287). His challengers, some of whom were his own preachers, showed clearly that he had not given sufficient weight to the influence of right opinions or beliefs in producing the righteous character and conduct which he claimed are the real mark of a Christian, and Wesley was frank enough to admit it (Works, Vol. V, p. 402, and Vol. VII, p. 286). This last reference is particularly clarifying on the subject. He says: "But though I aver thus, am I 'quite indifferent as to any man's opinion in religion'? Far, very far from it, as I have declared again and again, in the very sermon under consideration, in 'The Character of a Methodist,' in the 'Plain Account,' and twenty tracts beside. Neither do I conceal my sentiments. I have written severally and printed, against Deists, Papists, Mystics, Quakers, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Calvinists, and Antinomians. Nevertheless, *in all things indifferent* (but not at the expense of truth) I rejoice to 'Please all men for their good to edification, if haply I may gain more proselytes to genuine, scriptural Christianity. . . .

So far as I find them obstructive of this I oppose wrong opinions with my might." Of the Antinomians he wrote that the Methodists "Love them, but hate their doctrines; they abhor them as they do hell fire."

To further show that it is a great mistake to take some of Wesley's statements about "opinions" too seriously, it is only necessary to remember that he repeatedly testified that he and his followers held strongly to the creed of the Church of England. The following is a sample of many that could be quoted. "A serious clergyman [of the Church of England] desired to know in what points we differed from the Church of England. I answered, 'To the best of my knowledge, in none. The doctrines we preach are the doctrines of the Church of England, indeed the fundamental doctrines of the church, clearly laid down, both in her prayers Articles, and Homilies'" (Works, Vol. III, p. 153; also Vol. V, p. 248). Here is a plain avowal that his societies, because their members were also members of the Church of England, held to the same doctrinal standards which he later prescribed as the Creed of the Methodist Episcopal Church at its organization, and for loyalty to which the church is now attacked on the questionable ground of Wesley's so-called liberality toward doctrinal "Opinions," when the



truth is, he was not liberal at all as the term now is used, as witness the following: In his tract, *The Character of a Methodist*, he stated some of the doctrines which the Methodists considered fundamental to true faith. "We believe that 'all scripture is given by the inspiration of God,' and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels," and, it might be added, from some professors in the Methodist theological schools of to-day. Again, "We believe the written Word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice, and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Roman Church"; which statement is practically just what the question in the Ritual under attack, in paragraph 527, asks assent to, for "the doctrines of Holy Scripture set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church" are many of them directed particularly to combating the errors of the Roman Church. Again, "We believe Christ to be the eternal, supreme God, and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians"—and, we may add, from all the modern churches into which the same pernicious Unitarian heresy has spread, on the plea of liberalism in theology, forming the most deadening influence of our times upon the spiritual type of life which Methodism, under Wesley's leadership, sought to establish in the

world. Wesley concludes his summary of fundamental Methodist doctrines with the statement, "But as to all *opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity* [*italics ours—Author*], we think and let think" (Works, Vol. V, p. 240).

Later, in the sermon which he preached especially to clear up false impressions as to his liberality regarding "opinions," under the title "The Catholic Spirit," and from the text, "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? . . . If it be, give me thine hand" (Works, Vol. I, p. 346, sermon XXXIX), he specifies plainly what are the things which he considers "do not strike at the root of Christianity," and in which he can be liberal as to "opinions." They are modes of worship, forms of church government, manner of administering the Lord's Supper and baptism, or whether they are to be administered at all, like the Salvation Army's practice. "I dare not, therefore, presume to impose my mode of worship upon any other; I ask not of him with whom I would unite in love, are you of my church? Do you receive the same form of church government? Do you join in the same form of prayer? Do you receive the Supper of the Lord in the same posture and manner? Nor whether, in the administration of baptism you agree with me in admitting sureties for the baptized, in the manner of administering it, or the age of those

to whom it should be administered? Nay, I ask not whether you allow baptism or the Lord's Supper at all. Let all these things stand by; my only question is, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" These points actually comprise all that is plainly specified in this sermon on the side of liberality toward other people's "opinions." Yet how the changes have been rung on his use of this famous text in this sermon, to bolster up the claim of his great liberality!

But when we turn to the side of this sermon which specifies what he *required* in those to whom he is to give his hand, because their heart is as his heart, the array is perfectly startling. "But what is implied in the question, 'Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?' *Is thy heart right with God?* Dost thou believe his being and perfections?" (Then he rehearses them.) "Hast thou a divine evidence, a supernatural conviction of the things of God?" (What would happen to-day if the church would insist upon this test?) "Dost thou walk by faith, and not by sight, looking not at temporal things but at things eternal?" (How would this go with our modern shibboleth of "running the church on business principles"?) "Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? God over all, blessed forever? Is he revealed in thy soul? Dost thou

know Jesus Christ and him crucified? Does he dwell in thee and thou in him? Is he formed in thy heart by faith? Dost thou love God 'with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength'? Dost thou find thy happiness in him alone? . . . Art thou, accordingly, laying up thy treasure in heaven, and counting all things else but dung and dross? Hath the love of God cast the love of the world out of thy soul? . . . Does the love of God constrain thee to serve him with fear? . . . *Is thy heart right toward thy neighbor?* Do you 'love your enemies'? . . . Do you love even the enemies of God, do your bowels yearn over them, could you 'wish yourself (temporally) accursed' for their sake? . . . *Do you show your love by your works?* While you have time, as you have opportunity, do you, in fact, 'Do good unto all men, neighbors or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad'? Then, 'Thy heart is right as my heart is right with thy heart. If it be, give me thine hand.' I do not mean, be of my 'opinion.' You need not, I do not desire or expect it." Are these not *doctrines*, of the most serious kind?

Who, in the face of those searching inquiries, in the presence of these exalted standards, would be able to "give him his hand"? How trivial and unimportant, in comparison with those rigid re-

quirements for fellowship, seem the commonplace things which he specified as the things he would be willing to allow divergent opinions on. Can anybody for a moment believe that people could reach such heights of personal Christian attainment without mighty faith in the most vital doctrines taught in the Bible? In comparison with these standards the things required of people coming into the church of to-day are simple indeed! Yet Wesley required his societies to *live up* to these standards.

There is only one more point needing attention under this heading. It is doubtless true that one main thing Wesley was aiming at in his attitude toward "opinions" was to discount the practice prevailing in his time, and often since, of letting *mere intellectual assent* to the creeds take the place of heart faith, and heart knowledge, and heart *experience*, of the great teachings of Scripture. This is always the danger in a religion of ritualism. Dr. John S. Simon, a high authority in the English Wesleyan Church, author of the Summary of Methodist Law, has an admirable statement of this point in his article "John Wesley's Idea of a Christian," in *What is Christianity?* (Vol. II, p. 298). He says: "It is necessary to note that Wesley uses the word 'opinions' in a definite sense. He distinguishes between 'opinions' and 'beliefs.' He

does not undervalue the possession of right 'opinions' in matters of religion. It is clear that Wesley, by 'opinions,' means those private conclusions which we reach on matters concerning religion which do not touch the essential truths of Christianity. . . Wesley, in effect, says that a man may be orthodox and yet not be a Christian. He confronted congregations which repeated, without dissent from their truth, the creeds of the Christian Church. Their opinions about doctrine were correct. It never entered their heads to doubt the statements they repeated from week to week. They were orthodox. But Wesley saw that their consent to the creeds was merely an *intellectual* consent, and that it failed to affect their character or conduct. So he asserted that 'Orthodoxy, or right opinions, is a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all.' But we must not suppose that Wesley undervalued the Creeds. . . . We must not suppose that he looked upon the foundation truths of the Christian religion as matters upon which men might hold varying and antagonistic opinions. Orthodoxy might be 'but a slender part of religion,' but faith in its verities was absolutely essential. The great revival of the eighteenth century would never have been brought about by a man who lacked intensity of faith."

It is submitted that the foregoing presentation of evidence sustains the contention that Wesley's attitude of liberality toward "opinions" cannot justly be urged as ground for challenging the constitutionality of a practice by the Methodist Episcopal Church which seeks to establish members in the very doctrines which Wesley deemed fundamental to a true faith, and to secure the acceptance of a Creed to which he asserted repeatedly that the members of his societies were counted as subscribing, through their connection with the Church of England. Hence the conclusion is necessary that Wesley's so-called liberalism has no bearing upon the question at issue in this discussion. If it has any bearing, it is in support of the practice of the church.

*Third: Paragraph 29 Not a Part of the General Rules Proper*

The document in which John and Charles Wesley gave their societies what are known as the General Rules was not formulated until five years after the first societies were started. The people composing them had been admitted, as Wesley states, because they were seeking how to "flee from the wrath to come." There were definite regulations adopted at once, covering eleven points (Works, Vol. III, p. 66). *There is*

*no mention of the stipulation contained in paragraph 29 as to the "one condition" previously required of those seeking admission. The nearest approach to it is in point 5: "That any who desire admission into this society be asked, 'What are your reasons for desiring this? Will you be entirely open, using no kind of reserve? Have you any objection to any of our orders?' (Which may then be read.)"* Evidently, the "one condition" was *not* considered a rule, at that time, and for at least five years longer.

When the General Rules of the United Societies were finally framed in 1743, the title of the document was, "The Nature, Design, *and* General Rules [*italics ours*] of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle-upon-Tyne," etc. Certainly, according to this title, the document *contained something more* than the General Rules. It contained "The Nature" and "the Design" of these societies as well as the rules governing them. So the document was partly historical and partly explanatory (Works, Vol. V, p. 190). The document still bore this same title when it was inserted in the Minutes of the Christmas Conference when our church was organized, and did *not* have the term "General Rules" prefixed as it is now in the Discipline (Emory's History of Discipline, p. 177).



Neither was this term prefixed at the General Conference of 1808, at which time the Restrictive Rules were adopted (see Discipline of 1808). Hence the *whole* document was not considered as being the General Rules when the Restrictive Rule number 4, forbidding the General Conference to "Revoke or change the General Rules of the United Societies," was enacted. If it can be reasonably shown that paragraph 29, regarding the "one condition" *previously* required of those seeking admission, does not properly belong to that portion of the document which constitutes the General Rules, then it follows that paragraph 29 does not come under Restrictive Rule number 4. Certainly, the opening part, dealing with the circumstances under which the first societies were begun, is *historical*. Then follows an explicit statement of the "nature" of the movement. It says, "Such a society is no other than 'a company of men *having* the form [italics ours], and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.'"

From this it is clear that it was a *voluntary* association of people who were *eligible* to membership by "*having* the form of godliness," unit-

ing together for *mutual* spiritual help toward perfecting their Christian characters. It was not a teacher opening a school, nor a leader organizing a following, at that stage. Only persons of a certain type, elsewhere often called "serious persons," would wish to join or would be eligible. It was decided that the purposes of the society would be better served if they did not meet all together but should meet in smaller numbers, or classes. Hence the "Design" or plan of the working of the movement began to take shape in the method of constituting these classes and deciding upon the character of their meetings.

This brings us to paragraph 29. Before going on, in paragraph 30, to state the Rules under which the members were expected to live, the writers repeat what had already been stated in the historical part, and also in the part referring to the "Nature" of the society, as to the *qualifications* desired in those who were admitted, to show that the strict Rules now to be enumerated were not unreasonably exacting, if the end sought was to be attained. The people were required to *prove* their sincerity by obeying the Rules. Then follow three sections, numbered first, secondly, and thirdly, all devoted to the enumeration of the General Rules under which the members of the societies were expected to live. The very *form* of these sections indicates

that they constitute the rules, else why the numbering? The wording of paragraph 29 shows that it belongs with the general statement of the "Nature" of the society and the demand which it was the "Design" of the societies to meet. It specifies the *kind* of people who wanted the society and who were wanted in it. It refers to a *condition of mind* and not to a regulation of the society. It was *not* one of the Rules. These came later, as will presently be shown, *after* the candidate had been received. Paragraph 29 relates to a condition existing "previously" to a person being admitted to membership. The General Rules, in the very nature of the case, could only apply to those who had *already* been admitted. A man, though he has to prove his eligibility to join, does not come under the rules of a Masonic lodge until after he has been admitted. The analogy holds in the case of these Methodist societies.

From the beginning the Methodist Societies were greatly concerned about receiving only worthy people. In the earliest Conferences, as shown in the Larger Minutes, appears the following question: Q. "How shall we prevent improper persons insinuating themselves in the society?"

A. "Give tickets [admission to full membership] to none until they have been recommended

by a leader with whom they have met at least two months on trial."

"2. Give notes [admission on trial] to none but those who are recommended by one you know, or until they have met three or four times in class."

"3. *Give them the rules the first time they meet.* See that this is never neglected" (Works, Vol. V, p. 217; italics ours).

According to this explicit statement, which was also inserted in the Minutes of the Conference at which our church was organized, "The Rules" were not given people until *after* they had been admitted on trial or into class. While the "one condition" was something necessary *before* they were admitted at all, evidently the "one condition" was not one of the "Rules." It did not even admit on trial, for none could be admitted without satisfactory recommendation or testing. This is also made plain by another fact; that there were several other expressions used interchangeably with "A desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins," as the "one condition" *previously* necessary to admission. Attention has already been called to two of these: "Those who endeavor to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God," and those who "feared God and worked righteousness." The last was placed

explicitly as synonymous with the "one condition." Both are from the sermon, "The Ministerial Office" (Works, Vol. II. pp. 544, 545). In the sermon on "The Catholic Spirit," Wesley makes the expression "He that loveth God and all mankind" as the condition of acceptance in membership. In the article "Thoughts upon Methodism," his version is, "Those who desire to know what they must do to be saved." In Bangs's quotation of it, the second clause is marked (by "i. e.") as an explanation of the first. In the original statement of the "one condition" it contained only one clause, "A desire to flee from the wrath to come." The clause about "and to be saved from their sins," was added several years later. Evidently, there was nothing hard and fast, or iron-clad, about this "condition," since it was a *state of mind* instead of a rule.

Daniels, in his History of Methodism, page 337, says: "All that was required of one on being admitted to this fraternity was 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and obedience to the General Rules,' " showing that the "one condition" was not a rule, and he puts the whole statement in quotation marks, as from Wesley. The above interpretation is very strikingly supported by the fact that from the first, both in England and America, there stood in the Minutes and in

the Discipline a paragraph under the title, "Of the Privileges Granted to Serious Persons Who Are Not of Our Society." It asked how many times they should be permitted to meet with the classes before coming to a decision to unite with the society. Wesley's rule was to let them come to each alternate meeting for two or three times only. This was incorporated into the polity of our church at its organization, and remained, with slight alterations, for at least thirty years. Wesley, in his writings, very frequently refers to those who are eligible to membership in the societies as "serious" people, and as "those of serious mind." Coke and Asbury, in the remarkable document which they drew up in 1796, at request of the General Conference, as a current commentary on the Discipline for general distribution, devote one section to this part of the polity. They said: "It is manifestly our duty to fence in our society and to preserve it from intruders, otherwise we would soon become a desolate waste. At the same time we should suffer those who are apparently sincere, if they request it, to see our order and discipline twice or thrice, that they may themselves judge whether it will be for their spiritual advantage to cast in their lot among us" (Emory, *History of the Discipline*, p. 330). Thus it is made clear that people who met the qualifications as to

“serious persons” in the “one condition” were permitted to attend the meetings *without* becoming members or taking upon themselves the observance of the rules of the society. Nothing could show more clearly that the “one condition” was *not* one of the General Rules.

There was a particular reason why these Rules were called the “General Rules,” which seems not to have been before brought out in the discussion of this question at the General Conference. *It was to distinguish them from the rules of the bands and select societies* formed within the general society. They were sometimes called “The Rules of the *Society*” instead of “The General Rules.” Wesley was great on rules. He had rules for everything under his control, beginning with the Oxford Holy Club. There were rules for class leaders, for stewards, for assistants, for helpers, for teachers, and for students in his schools. Each set of workers had its own set of rules to guide it, and everything was planned for them down to the minutest detail. Wesley gave them all to understand the same thing he insisted on with his preachers, that it was their business “Not to mend the rules, but to keep them.” The organization of his societies was on the following plan: “The United Societies (which are the largest of all) consist of awakened persons. Part of these, who are sup-

posed to have remission of sins, are more closely united in Bands. Those in the Bands who seem to walk in the light of God, compose the Select Societies. Those of them who have made shipwreck of faith met apart as Penitents" (From Minutes of 1744, New History of Methodism, Vol. I, p. 308). No person could be admitted to the Bands from the Classes until they had been on trial three months. The special rules for each of these organizations are given in A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists (Works, Vol. V, p. 183, 185. Later changes, *Ibid.*, pp. 192, 193). There were no special rules for the Penitents. They were put back on trial until they either recovered their state of grace or were excluded. Membership tickets were good for only three months. If the ticket was not renewed, the person was considered excluded.

The reasoning upon which this strict practice was based is stated at the conclusion of the General Rules and is a strong argument in support of the contention that the provisions of paragraph 29 do not belong to the Rules: "These are the General Rules of our societies, all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, *which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule* [*italics ours*], both of our faith and practice. And all of these we know his



Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observes them not, who habitually breaks any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But if then he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls."

Remember that these rules are explicitly stated to be for those who are "among us," which means *members*. It also expressly says that all these things are written of the Spirit on "truly awakened hearts." Wesley's own classification quoted above, says that the members of the United Societies consist of "awakened persons." This must, of course, refer to those who have been advanced from being on trial to membership. Hence these regulations, known as the General Rules, were for the *general membership* of the societies *before* they were advanced to membership in the Bands or Select Societies. The "one condition" required "previously" to being admitted on trial is not referred to in the above summary at all. The language itself excludes that.

There is only one more point to consider under this head. That is, What did our church at its organization, and in adopting the Restrictive

Rules later, desire to do in perpetuating the General Rules of the early societies? This can be answered very directly by quoting from the Minutes of the organizing Conference the re-affirmation of the purpose of the organization of the Methodists in England, "To reform the nation, and to spread scriptural holiness over this continent." Though forming now an independent church instead of a society *within* a church, they desired still to lay the emphasis on the production of exemplary Christian character and they believed the General Rules, as above defined, a mighty agency to accomplish this. Out of their use the very name of "Methodist" had arisen. That they did *not* have in mind the perpetuation of the regulations for admission into membership merely, is plain from the fact that they at once proceeded, as will be later shown, to change these regulations. Wheeler states this point well in his One Thousand Questions and Answers. He says: "What were the General Rules? A concise statement for the regulation of Christian life so general as to be applicable to all Methodist societies." He does not say a word about these Rules including methods of *receiving* members. They are concerned only about *training* them, after reception into the church. Coke and Asbury, in the document mentioned above upon the Discipline,

in speaking about the General Rules, call them "One of the completest systems of Christian ethics or morals, for its size, which ever was published by an uninspired writer." In discussing them they make no reference at all to the "one condition," as though it were not a part of this wonderful moral system. The General Conference of 1808 applied a Restrictive Rule to changing or revoking the General Rules. Nathan Bangs was a member of that General Conference. In commenting on this restriction, in his History of our Church, he gives the reason for it. In Vol. II, page 233, he says: "The unanimity with which these restrictive regulations were adopted by the Conference shows the deep sense which was very generally felt, of the propriety of limiting the powers of the General Conference, so as to secure forever *the essential doctrines* of Christianity from all encroachments, as well as those *rules of moral conduct* so succinctly and precisely embodied in the General Rules" [italics ours]. He makes no reference whatever to the Conference having in mind the method of receiving members. They were concerned only about safeguarding the doctrines in the Articles of Religion, and the rules of moral conduct set forth specifically in the General Rules. Let it be clearly borne in mind that the term "General Rules," as stated above, was not

at that time set above the title Wesley gave to his document, "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies," as we now find it in our Discipline. This was the unauthorized work of some later editor of the Discipline, who doubtless affixed this heading to the document merely for convenience of reference.

In view of all these evidences herewith submitted the conclusion seems unavoidable that the provisions of paragraph 29 are *not* in the General Rules proper at all, and hence do not come under the restrictions of the fourth Restrictive Rule, and therefore a main legal prop to the Appeal in question is removed.

*Fourth: Paragraph 29 Never more than a Provision for Admission "On Trial"*

Paragraph 29 was never more than a provision for admission "*on trial*" either in the societies or in our church. Methodism has had a probationary system of receiving members from the very beginning up to the present time, both in the societies and in our church, and also in the ministry. It has been one of the most definitely fixed features of our polity. This fact, alone, is fatal to the contentions of the Appeal if the "one condition" only admitted to probation.

The first societies, organized jointly by the Wesleys and the Moravians, adopted this plan,

which had long been practiced by the Moravians in Germany and in England, following the practice of the primitive church.

The first set of Rules states this. They were as follows (Works, Vol. III, p. 66):

“1. That we will meet together once a week to ‘confess our faults one to another, and pray for one another, that we may be healed.’ ”

“2. That the persons so meeting be divided into several Bands, or little companies, none of them consisting of less than five or more than ten persons.”

“3. That every one, in order, speak as freely and plainly and concisely as he can, the real state of his heart, with his several temptations and deliverances, since the last time of meeting.”

“4. That all the Bands have a conference every Wednesday night, begun and ended with singing and prayer.”

“5. That any who desire to be admitted into the society be asked: ‘What are your reasons for desiring this? Will you be entirely open, using no kind of reserve? Have you any objection to any of our orders? (Which may then be read).’ ”

“6. That when any new member is proposed, every person present speak clearly and freely whatever objection he has to him.”

“7. That those against whom no reasonable

objection appears, be, *in order for their trial* [italics ours], formed into one or more distinct Bands, and some person agreed on to assist them."

"8. *That after two months' trial* [italics ours], if no objection then appear, they may be admitted into society."

The remaining three Rules are omitted as not pertinent.

These rules were in force in 1743, having been adopted in 1738. It will be noticed that the "one condition" is not mentioned, yet this list contains the germ of all that was in the later regulations. The two months "on trial" continued until it was increased to three. The requirement of probation was never rescinded.

About the time the General Rules were given out Wesley put this entry into his Journal: "In the evening, having desired all the Bands to meet, I read over the names of the United Society, and marked those who were of doubtful character, that full inquiry might be made concerning them. Many of the afterward gave sufficient proof that they were seeking Christ in sincerity. *The rest I determined to keep on trial* until the doubts concerning them were removed" (Works, Vol. III, p. 207; italics ours). This entry shows that the time of "trial" could be prolonged indefinitely.

In the Minutes of 1744, which was the first Conference of preachers, or "helpers," as Wesley called them, appears the question before quoted: "How shall we prevent improper persons insinuating themselves into the society?" The first answer is, "Give tickets to none till they are recommended by a leader with whom they have met at least two months on trial. Second: Give notes to none but those who are recommended by someone you know, or until they have met three or four times in class."

These questions and answers stood in the Minutes of both the English and American Conferences until long after our church was organized. In 1836 the language was changed to read, instead of "Give tickets to none" to "Let none be received into the church," and the rule, "Give notes to none" to "Let none be admitted on trial," thus giving a modern translation to the older formula and making its meaning plain. These quotations not only show the firm establishment of the probationary system of receiving members at the very start of Methodism, but also that before being received *from* probation the candidates had to be examined and recommended by somebody appointed for that purpose, again making it absolutely clear that the "one condition" admitted to nothing but membership "on trial," and even that only

after recommendation or testing. In his *Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, printed in 1748, Wesley describes the duties of an assistant or "helper." Among these he is "To put the disorderly back on trial, and to receive on trial for the Bands or society." This rule was also inserted into the Minutes of the Conference of 1784 which organized our church.

The plan of receiving people only "on trial" was also applied to the receiving of ministers. At first they were kept on trial only one year, but this was later extended to four years. Commenting on what this being "on trial" meant, a definite statement was inserted in the Minutes in England and was afterward incorporated into the Minutes of the Conference at which our church was organized, and still stands in our Discipline. "Observe: Taking 'on trial' is entirely different from admitting a preacher. One on trial may either be admitted or rejected without doing him any wrong; otherwise it would be no trial at all" (Emory, *History of the Discipline*, p. 64).

There can be no doubt that Wesley applied this same reasoning to receiving members into the societies. In fact, the rule for the receiving of preachers grew out of the practice of receiving members. He required his assistants and helpers to visit the classes quarterly and to admit to



membership such as were found worthy, and to exclude the unworthy, on the principle that excluding those on trial who were not found satisfactory candidates for membership, did them no harm or wrong. This same practice still prevails in the church regarding probationers, and it grew out of the original custom. This process did not require a formal trial. When Wesley was criticised for this summary method of dealing with the people in his societies, he justified it on the ground that unworthy people could not be allowed to remain, lest they influence others injuriously. At first even full members could thus be excluded. Now, if the "one condition" admitted only to membership "on trial," there must have been something else which admitted people to full membership. What was it? The quotation of rules given above, suggests it plainly. They were put under the care of leaders for instruction and for deepening of their religious life. This was the most important duty of the leaders. They had to give those on trial recommendation to the minister or helper showing that they were worthy to be received into full membership. Wesley claimed that this practice was the same as that of the primitive church. In his tract *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, he says: "Upon reflection I could not but

observe, This is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity. In the earliest times those whom God had sent forth 'preached the gospel to every creature.' And 'the body of hearers' were mostly Jews or heathens. But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met these 'catechumens,' as they were then called, apart from the congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort and pray with them, and for them, according to their several necessities" (Works, Vol. V, p. 177).

Bishops Coke and Asbury, who were in close personal relations with Wesley, said in their Commentary on the Discipline, in 1796: "The most respectable divine since the primitive ages, if not since the time of the apostles, was Mr. Wesley. By his long and incessant labors he raised up a multitude of societies who looked to him for direction. . . . He was peculiarly attached to the laws and customs of the church in the primitive times of Christianity." Rehearsing the peculiar features of Wesley's polity for his societies, they describe his probationary system. After stating the method of receiving preachers on trial and later into full fellowship

in the Conferences, they describe the method of receiving *members* into the societies according to Wesley's practice, modifying it only so far as it had been changed at the organization of our church. "On application for admission into the society, they [the people wishing to join] must be duly recommended to the preacher who has the oversight of the circuit, by one in whom he can place sufficient confidence, or must have met three or four times in class, and must be truly awakened to a sense of their fallen condition. *Then* the preacher who has the oversight of the circuit gives them notes of admission and they remain on trial for six months. When the six months are expired they receive tickets, *if recommended by their leader*, and become full members of the society. *And to prevent any future complaint on the ground of ignorance*, the rules of the society must be read to them the first time they meet in class" (Emory, History of the Discipline, p. 301; italics ours).

The only departure of these regulations from those used from the beginning of Wesley's work is in the length of the time on trial. It will be noticed with interest that the "one condition" admitted people to attendance in the classes a few times even before they were enrolled as "on trial." Also that the rules were given to them to study as soon as they were admitted, in order

“to prevent any *future* complaint on the ground of ignorance” after they became members. This is another decisive proof that the “one condition” was *not* one of the General Rules. That this admission to membership on trial involved instruction and examination by the leaders as to the faith and experience of the candidates as fitness for reception into full membership is made plain by the statement in this same important historical document just preceding the part quoted. It says: “The due examination of candidates for the ministry is of the utmost importance. In respect to doctrines, experience, and practice, the preachers *will have passed already* through various examinations *before* they are received into the traveling connection. Let us take a view of the whole, remembering that *our societies* form our grand universities for ministers of the gospel.” Then follows the quotation given above as to the methods of receiving members into the societies. But one conclusion can be drawn from this illuminating testimony from the very highest authorities in the church at its organization, namely, that the courses of instruction and indoctrination through which people were put after being admitted on trial in the church or society and carried on after admission into full membership, through training as class leaders,

exhorters and local preachers, constituted a real educational preparation for full membership and the very highest positions in the church.

This section of the document closes with this significant statement, bearing on the above conclusion: "And those who will not be satisfied with *this whole process of probation*, considered in all its parts, must be rigid indeed. When we consider the importance of the gospel ministry, this severe process is by no means excessive."

Wesley frequently referred to his study of Lord King's *An Inquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity and Worship of the Primitive Church*, and admitted that he based many of his practices upon its teachings. Bishop R. J. Cooke, in his *History of the Ritual of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, page 224, gives a strong confirmation of the influence of this great book upon Wesley's Church polity, especially in its bearings on the organization of our church under Wesley's guidance. He says: "In the primitive church the laity were divided into two classes, the catechumens, or learners, and the believers, or full members. The former correspond, in their general relation to the church, to our probationers, who are in the meaning of the term, catechumens. Catechumens were candidates for baptism and church membership. They were placed under the care and instruction of a

teacher in divine things, called a *catechist*, who taught them the doctrines of Christianity and the duties of a Christian. The conditions required for the enrollment as a catechumen were the same as that required by the General Rules of our church, for Wesley ever had the practices of the primitive church before him—‘A desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.’ The privileges of full membership—such as partaking of the Lord’s Supper, which was regarded as the highest privilege possible; deeper instruction in Christian doctrine; taking part in the election of ministers and other officers—were all denied the probationer until he had passed the period of his trial and was found faithful.” He gives Cave’s Primitive Church as the authority for his statements. These various citations, all of them being from the very highest sources, prove conclusively that the “one condition” in paragraph 29 had the following relation to the reception of members into Wesley’s societies, and later into the Methodist Episcopal Church:

*a.* It admitted into classes a few times without people being required to join the society.

*b.* It *never* admitted to more than membership “on trial,” and yet that relation was a real degree of membership, admitting to many of the privileges of the society.

c. It did *not* admit to full membership, and the candidate could be refused permission to go further without doing him any wrong.

d. It was necessary, before a candidate could be received into full membership, that he be not only tested, but instructed, and examined as to his faith and fitness for full membership; this involved a knowledge of the vital doctrines of the society or of the church. At first the members voted on his reception, and also after Wesley's death, as shown in the quotation from Crowther later.

Now, as to the bearing of all this on the question under discussion: If the "one condition" was not a passport to full membership, then there can be no bar in it to the church making other tests necessary now for such reception into full membership. The fact that the instruction and examination of candidates before their recommendation for full membership was given privately, either by a class leader or by the minister, instead of before the congregation, has no bearing on the point at issue, since *private* tests would be barred as much as *public* ones, if the "one condition" governed reception into full membership. This writer, after diligent search, has not found a single authority claiming that the "one condition" admitted to full membership.

Besides this, there was a very sufficient reason why formal creedal ceremonies were not used in receiving people into full membership in Wesley's societies, after they had been on trial for several months; and that is, because they were supposed to be members already of the Church of England, which had its own statement of the Creed, hence it was not necessary in the societies. In one of Wesley's replies to an attack by a clergyman of the Church of England he declared it was a rule of his societies, "That if any man separate himself from the church, he is no longer a member of our society" (Works, Vol. V, p. 312). As late as 1764 Wesley wrote *A Short History of Methodism*, and in it states, "At present those who remain with Mr. Wesley are mostly Church of England men. They love her Articles, her Homilies, her Liturgy, her Discipline, and unwillingly vary from it in any instance" (Works, Vol. V, p. 248).

This statement not only shows plainly why no formal Creed was required in the societies, but also explains another very important point which comes next in order for consideration.

*Fifth: The Giving of a Creed and Ritual*

Our fifth point is that Wesley gave the Methodist Episcopal Church, at its organization, not only a Creed, but a Ritual form for receiving



members from probation into full membership.

Article XXVII of the Anglican Creed, from which Wesley condensed the Articles of Religion of our church, states: "Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized, but it is also a sign of regeneration, or the new birth whereby, as by an instrument, *they that receive baptism rightfully are grafted into the Church,*" etc. (Emory, History of the Discipline, p. 104; italics ours).

Bishop Goodwin, of the Church of England, in Foundations of the Creed, page 24 of the Preface, says plainly that assent to the Apostles' Creed in baptism is a condition of being admitted into the church. On page 14 of the Introduction he further speaks of the Creed: "And it should be added that ever since the primitive days until now, the profession of belief has formed not only the test of fitness to enter the church, but also a distinct portion of Christian worship." In McClintock and Strong, page 560, it is stated that catechumens were required to subscribe to the Apostles' Creed before receiving baptism, and before being received into the primitive church. Also, *Ibid.*, page 460, "In the Church of England, and in the Protestant Episcopal Church, these churches direct that the

child shall be confirmed as soon as he can repeat the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and is instructed in the catechism set forth for that purpose." This is in cases where children have been baptized in infancy. Adults were always required to assent to the Creed in baptism before being admitted to church membership. Bishop Cooke, in his *History of the Ritual of our Church*, page 188, says: "Baptism is not only a sign or seal of God's gracious promises; it is also the divinely instituted *rite of admission to the Church of God*. Under the old covenant without circumcision there was no citizenship in the commonwealth of Israel; and under the new covenant, without baptism, which takes the place of circumcision, there can be no part in the fellowship of God's people. The prerequisites or conditions for baptism in the apostolic church were repentance and faith."

Wesley, in answering a clergyman of the English Church, showing how the Methodists hold the same creed as the church, speaks of the view of baptism held by the church and also by the Methodists. He says: "Infants, indeed, our church supposes to be justified in baptism even though they cannot then either believe or repent. But she expressly requires both repentance and faith in those who come to be

baptized when they are of riper years" (Works, Vol. V, p. 38).

In his treatise on baptism he more fully elucidates his views on baptism as the means of admitting members into the church. He says: "*By baptism we are admitted into the church, and consequently made members of Christ, its head. The Jews were admitted into the church by circumcision, so are Christians by baptism. For 'By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body,' namely, the church, 'the body of Christ.'* But did our Saviour design that this should remain always in his church? . . . This may be dispatched in few words, since there can be no reasonable doubt that it was intended to last as long as the church into which it is the appointed means of entering. In the ordinary way *there is no other means of entering into the church or into heaven*" (Works, Vol. VI, p. 15, date 1756; italics ours). This position he never changed. Accordingly, when he gave a Ritual and a Creed to our church at its organization, he followed the custom of the Church of England, above set forth, and with which he was entirely familiar, and *made the baptismal ceremony the Ritual for receiving members from trial into full membership.* Of this there can be no doubt. The ceremony itself states the fact. In Emory's History of the Discipline, page 203, is the following account:

“The order prepared by Wesley contained the following parts, which are omitted in later editions, namely: the first prayer was—  
 “Almighty and everlasting God, who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water, and also didst safely lead the children of Israel, thy people, through the Red Sea, figuring thereby thy holy baptism, . . . we beseech thee, for thine infinite mercies, that thou wilt mercifully look upon these thy servants, wash them and sanctify them by the Holy Ghost, that they being delivered from thy wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ’s Church,” etc. After baptizing, the minister was to say, “Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that these persons are grafted into the body of Christ’s Church,” etc. (see also Sherman’s *History of the Discipline*, pp. 305, 306).

The baptismal vows had then, as now, an assent to the Apostles’ Creed as their chief feature. If people had been baptized in infancy they were asked at confirmation in the Church of England, to reaffirm the baptismal covenant. From this source has come the use of that same form in our Ritual, as at present used. One of the first things gladly used in America when Wesley authorized the ordination of some of the American preachers at the time of the organization of

our church, was the baptism of children. Bangs, in his *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. I, page 159, tells how averse the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists were to doing this for the Methodists, unless the parents were members of their churches or would assent to their creeds; and as the Methodists could not do this, their children went without baptism until after our own ministers were authorized to administer it. The form prescribed by Wesley for the baptism of children or infants, conformed much, though not wholly, to that of the Church of England (see both Emory and Sherman, *History of the Discipline*). It constituted them members of the church *on trial*. Then they were put under careful instruction by the preachers, with a catechism especially prepared for them which covered all the essential points in our Ritual of to-day for receiving people into full membership, with the exception that they were not asked, at first, to be examined publicly, but privately by the preacher. In the disciplinary provisions adopted in 1784 the following stipulation was made: "Let the elders, deacons, and preachers take a list of the names of the children, and if any of them be truly awakened, let them be admitted into society" (Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. I, p. 204).

This refers to admission into full membership, if they had been baptized. Another rule, in the same paragraph, required instruction in the Catechism.

To fully understand the disciplinary requirements of our church at the time of its organization, regarding the reception of members, the peculiar powers of the preacher must be remembered. As has been shown earlier in this chapter, Wesley claimed supreme power in his societies, including the power to receive and to exclude members. Only when the numbers became too great for his personal attention did he delegate this power to his "helpers" or "assistants," as the preachers were called. It never, during his life, resided in the society by vote, except while with the Moravians. The same thing was true in the organization of our church. At first all authority for receiving or expelling members was vested in the preacher, except that one excluded could appeal to the Quarterly Conference. Later the Leader's Meeting had to recommend probationers for reception into full membership. In their Commentary on the Discipline Coke and Asbury take great pains to explain and enforce this authority of the preacher. In the section on "The Duties of Those Who Have Charge of the Circuits" is the following: "5. He is also to receive members

upon trial, and into society, according to the form of Discipline. If this authority were invested in the society, or any part of it, the great work of revival would soon be at an end. . . . Glory be to God, *all* our societies throughout the world . . . have been raised, under grace, *by our ministers and preachers*. . . . We would sooner go out again into the highways and hedges to form new societies as at first, than we would give up a privilege so essential to the ministerial office” (Sherman’s History of the Discipline, pp. 364, 365).

Again (*Ibid.*, p. 366): “Besides, the command of our Lord, ‘Go ye and teach all nations, *baptizing* them,’ etc., is addressed to *pastors only*—to his disciples, and through them to all his *ministering* servants to the end of the world. But if ministers are to be the judges of the proper subjects of baptism, *which is the grand initiatory ordinance into the visible church*, how much more should they have the right to determine whom they will take under *their own* care, or whom God has given them out of the world by the preaching of his word” (italics in text).

The aim of this argument, which is very extensive in the document quoted from, is to justify the practice of the church in withholding from the laity or the society the right to determine who should be received into membership.

Hence, in keeping with this attitude of both the societies and our church at first, the pastor conducted all instruction and examination of candidates for baptism and reception into full membership, and even decided who should be received on trial as well as who should be excluded.

This explains why, at first, there was no requirement of a public form other than that of baptism, for receiving probationers into full membership. Later, when the pastor was shorn of this authority, the public reception before the congregation was required.

It will be noticed in the above quotation from Coke and Asbury, that "*Baptism is the initiatory ordinance into the visible church.*" In the Methodist Church, wherever this had not been performed in infancy, it was performed publicly in the society or church. The custom of the Church of England to permit private baptisms was discarded (Emory, *History of the Discipline*, p. 200).

The conclusions from the foregoing quotations are clear:

- a. That baptism was considered the Ritual for receiving members.
- b. That in that Ritual was required assent to the Apostles' Creed.
- c. That in case of children baptized in in-



fancy, they were members on trial, to be prepared for full membership by careful instruction in catechism, under the care of the pastor.

*d.* That by this practice both Wesley and the organizers of our church gave positive proof that in their minds the "one condition" did *not* govern reception into full membership, and was not intended to do so.

Hence it cannot be unconstitutional for the church which disregarded paragraph 29 at its organization, under Wesley's guidance, to now use a Ritual for receiving probationers into full membership, since Wesley and the founders of our church made baptism such a Ritual.

*Sixth: A Rule of Interpretation Established*

Our sixth point is that the continuous practice of the church, since its organization, as testified by writers on history and the Discipline, establishes a rule of interpretation as to the law of the church which is decisive.

It is a well-known principle of law everywhere that the *intent* of the framers of a law, if it can be determined, must govern in the interpretation of the law. Now, it so happens that it is not at all difficult to determine what place and force the organizers of our church assigned to the provisions of paragraph 29. They and their founder, Mr. Wesley, recognized clearly the

great difference between a loosely organized religious society *within* a long-established state church, and an independent church planted in an independent country. Already some of the organizers have been quoted earlier in this article.

Nathan Bangs, who entered our ministry in 1802, only eighteen years after the organization of the church, in his history says: "We have arrived at a very important period in the history of Methodism in this country. And as so much has been said respecting the constituting of the Methodist societies here into an independent church, I shall, in the first place, give a detail of the facts in the case, and, secondly, offer some arguments in defense of the measure.

"Hitherto the Methodists, both in Europe and America, had been considered as a society *within* a church—in Great Britain they considered themselves as members of the Establishment—in America as members of that denomination to which they might be attached. The preachers in both hemispheres, not having been consecrated to their work by the imposition of hands, were distinguished as 'lay preachers,' and had not presumed to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. But all solicitation, whether from the preachers or people, for the establishment of a separate church had been

strenuously resisted by Mr. Wesley, as being foreign to his primary design and incompatible with the principles he had avowed from the beginning of his ministry. He commenced his ministerial labors with the single intention of reviving evangelical religion in the church, by *preaching her doctrines and enforcing her discipline*. This was the state of things at the time of which we are now speaking” (Bangs, A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 151; italics ours). After narrating the reasons which forced Wesley to change his mind and to consent to the formation of an independent church out of the societies in America, he defends this action in the following words: “In fact, in organizing the Methodist Episcopal Church he did not separate from either the English or the Protestant Episcopal Church; for that church had no jurisdiction here, and the Methodist was organized some time before the Protestant Episcopal Church had an existence. Hence he acted perfectly consistent with himself, with all his avowals of attachment to the Church of England, while he proceeded to organize a church here; for while he did this, and thereby established a separate and independent church in America, where the English Church had no jurisdiction, he and his people in England still remained members of the Establishment.”

This statement makes it perfectly plain that in the organization of our church Methodism entered upon an entirely new plan of work and became an entirely different thing from what it had before been. It was no longer a religious society, but a full-fledged church, an ecclesiastical institution. It no longer took orders, but only recommendations, from Mr. Wesley, and acted upon its own judgment. It refused to accept Coke and Asbury and Whatcoat as superintendents or bishops by his appointment, but elected them to the office (*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 157). They added one of the Articles of Religion, the XXIII, to better suit their own ideas of a proper loyalty to the American government. They made some alterations in the Liturgy he sent over for them, and refused to wear the vestments which he advised. While at the organizing Conference they pledged fealty to Wesley while he lived, they rescinded the action in 1787. Bangs says: "At the Conference of 1787, in consequence of its having been pleaded by Dr. Coke that the Conference was under obligation to receive Mr. Whatcoat for a bishop because it was the wish of Mr. Wesley, the minute which had been adopted in 1784 declaring that 'During the life of Mr. Wesley we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the gospel, ready, in matters of church government, to obey

his commands,' was so far modified as to leave them at liberty to depart from his advice whenever they might think it *incompatible with their rights and privileges as an independent church*" (*Ibid.*, p. 277; italics ours). Bangs further adds: "These proceedings were not agreeable to Mr. Wesley, especially as they seemed to imply an abjuration of his authority, inasmuch as his name was not inserted in the Minutes" (*Ibid.*, p. 278).

They elected twelve men to elder's orders and three to deacon's, and ordained them, defining their duties. They constituted the presiding-eldership, which was not used in England. They extended the time of trial membership to six months. They refused permission to any except full members to partake of the Lord's Supper. They permitted people who attended other churches, and received the communion there, to be members of our church by coming in on trial. They made attendance at class obligatory, on pain of expulsion. They added to the General Rules one on slavery, prohibiting any person holding slaves from being admitted to membership or to the Lord's Supper. They made marriage with unbelievers a cause of expulsion from the church. They made the rules against the use of intoxicating liquors more stringent. They adopted a complete Ritual for the administra-

tion of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the solemnization of marriage. The custom, from the first, was to require baptism before reception into full membership. In 1836 it was put in the Discipline. That baptism was regarded as a form of Ritual for receiving members into full connection, is shown by the language of the Discipline of 1808, in which General Conference the Restrictive Rules were adopted. The form of address given for the minister to use, speaking to the congregation, was: "I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of his bounteous goodness he will grant to these persons, that which by nature they cannot have, that they, being baptized with water and the Holy Ghost, *may be received into Christ's Holy Church and be made lively members of the same*" (italics ours). This form still stands in the Discipline substantially as then used.

All these things are recorded either in Bangs's history, published in 1838, in which he devotes sixty-eight pages of his first volume to the plan of the organization of our church, or else are in Emory's or Sherman's histories of the Discipline, the first published in 1843, and the last in 1874.

That the "one condition" of paragraph 29 did *not* admit to full membership in the church goes without saying, in the face of all these facts. In

the case of people attending other churches being allowed to become members of ours it was stipulated, "They shall have full liberty [to join] if they comply with our rules," again strongly suggesting that the "one condition" was not considered one of the General Rules, because in the case of such candidates they were not subjected to its requirements, yet they were required to "comply with our rules."

Jonathan Crowther was an eminent preacher and educator in the English Wesleyan Church. In 1811 he published a very interesting book under the title *Portraiture of Methodism*. An edition of it was printed in New York for our church in 1813, by our book agents, thus giving it a semiofficial standing. It contains some interesting items bearing upon the disciplinary questions now under discussion. He says, p. 203: "The rules of discipline were not made all at once, but almost every Conference has made some additions as circumstances have required. . . Some of the rules were made to suit circumstances which in their nature were but temporary." Under the topic, "Receiving Members in the Society" p. 208, he gives the following: "1. The leaders' meeting has a right to declare any persons on trial improper to be received into the society; and after such declaration the superintendent shall not admit

such persons into the society. 2. Neither the superintendent, or any other preacher, shall give tickets [admitting to full membership] to any till they are recommended by a leader with whom they have met at least two months on trial. 3. No preacher shall give notes (admitting persons on trial) to any but those who are recommended by one he knows, or till they have met three or four times in class. 4. He must give them *the rules of the society* the first time they meet [*italics ours*]." On page 224, speaking of this same subject, he says: "In general, no person is admitted into the society, even upon trial, except recommended by some person acquainted with them. The superintendent has power to admit *on trial* persons recommended by a leader with whom they have met. . . . *Every person admitted into the society* is not only to conform to the rules, but is required to meet in the class to which he or she belongs," etc. On page 223, he says that in administering the sacraments they "adhere to the form of the Church of England." Speaking of the doctrinal beliefs of the Methodists, of which he gives a long list, he says, page 193, "They believe baptism to be an ordinance appointed by Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to be to him a sign or emblem



of regeneration," etc. Of the class meetings he states, page 225: "They afford opportunities for teaching religious truths, for quickening languishing piety," etc. Of the class leader, page 226: "He is to be truly pious, apt to teach, according to the design of the class meeting." Practically every point contended for in this Argument, is here set forth, in an official publication dating about the time of the General Conference of 1808.

Abel Stevens, in the Preface to his History of Methodism, edition of 1858, speaks of "Dr. James Porter and his excellent 'Compendium,' our best practical Manual of Methodism." It was issued first in 1851, the author having entered the ministry in 1830, and was one of the book agents at New York, elected in 1856. Speaking of the organization of our church, Porter says: "It was at this Conference that our present Articles of Religion and the general system of discipline by which our church has since been governed, were adopted. The main features of the discipline agreed upon at that time *have been sacredly maintained to the present*" (Compendium, Ed. 1874, p. 135; italics ours).

This means that the methods of receiving members have not been materially changed from that time until now. Porter clearly states what

these methods have been. He says: "To receive members hastily is to endanger the purity and reputation of the church; to delay candidates too long may injure them. In trying to avoid these two extremes Methodists have adopted arrangements peculiar to themselves. Our church receives none *on trial* 'until they have met twice or thrice in class,' or unless we are assured that they are *suitable* persons to be received. Our rules being explained to them, they are then placed under the watch-care of a class leader, and instructed as it is found necessary; and giving satisfactory evidence of piety, they are baptized and admitted to the Lord's Supper.

"The time of continuing persons in this relation has varied at different periods. In 1789 it was extended to six months. If after this term of probation they have been baptized, and, on examination, it appears that they are Methodists in faith, *and are disposed to observe the rules*, of the church, they may be admitted to full membership, *and be entitled to the privileges and subject to the discipline of other members*. In being received on trial they only profess 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come.' They do not say they are Methodists, or believe our doctrines or discipline. They may know nothing about either. . . But having been received into full connection, they stand in quite a different rela-

tion. They now profess to believe both our doctrine and discipline, *and are governed by them*. . . . Before they were only candidates; *now* they are *members*. Whether this probationary system is, on the whole, expedient, is a question about which good men may differ. . . . But another fact to be considered in this connection is that an enterprising church will often find itself as little acquainted with its converts as they are with theology and church government. . . . No *specific* form of receiving probationers into full connection has been maintained among us further than to examine them before the church as to their faith and *willingness to observe our rules*. In other respects preachers have followed their own judgment and taste. . . . This is now provided for in our ritual, which is substantially followed, though not with verbal uniformity. . . . Till 1840 our Discipline *contained no exception* to the rule requiring a probation. Persons coming to us from other denominations, however intelligent and pious, had to join on trial and graduate in due form. . . . A rule was then introduced providing that a member in good standing in any orthodox church, who shall desire to unite with us, may be received at once into full fellowship 'giving satisfactory answers to the usual inquiries'" (Compendium, pp. 433-436).

Here, plainly stated by this high authority, whose text was for many years standard in our courses of study for ministers, are all the main points contended for in this chapter. *a.* That the "one condition" admitted only to membership on trial, and this only after testing or recommendation. *b.* That the "one condition" was not considered a part of the General Rules, for he expressly states that candidates for membership are not "subject to the rules," nor "governed by them," nor asked to express their willingness "to observe the rules" *until they come into full membership*. And he also speaks of the "one condition" as merely indicating those who are "suitable" to be received on trial. *c.* That while on probation they must be "examined," either publicly or privately, as to their faith and knowledge of "Methodist doctrines and discipline," and their readiness to accept them, before they can be received into full membership. *d.* The administration of baptism, also before being received in full connection, in which is an assent to the Apostles' Creed.

And let it be noted carefully that he says these regulations, in their main features, "have been sacredly maintained from the beginning to the present time." In other words, the *practice* of the church from its organization to the present has been exactly in line with the present practice

of regarding the "one condition" as applying only to admission on trial, and in no way forbidding other requirements for admission into full membership.

Bishop O. C. Baker was elected to the episcopacy in 1852. In 1855 he published his justly famous manual on the Discipline. It still stands very high in the estimation of scholars in church law. In the first edition of his book he gives an especially illuminating discussion of the methods of our church in receiving members. He says in his Preface: "It may be proper to say that on most of the points which contain opinions on discipline, I have conversed frequently and largely with many of our most enlightened and able ministers, and they agree with these opinions." So that the version he gives of the disciplinary practices of the church is not only his own, but also that of the best minds of that day, all of them so close to the founding of our church as to have direct knowledge of the facts of our history. Bishop Baker began his ministry in 1833. He says: "The regularly constituted pastor is the proper authority to admit suitable persons to the communion of the church. The preacher in charge, acting at first under the authority of Mr. Wesley, received members into the society, and severed their relations from the church, accord-

ing to his own convictions of duty. In 1784 the assistant was restricted from giving tickets to any until they had been recommended by a leader with whom they had met at least two months on trial. In 1789 the term of probation was extended to six months. In 1836 the phrase 'Give tickets to none' was changed to 'Let none be received into the Church.' Hence, *since the organization of our church*, none could be received into full communion who had not been previously recommended by a leader; and since 1840 it has been required that the applicant pass a satisfactory examination *before the church*, respecting the correctness of his doctrine, and his willingness to observe the rules of the church.

. . . Persons in good standing in other *orthodox* churches, who desire to unite with us, may, by giving satisfactory answers to the *usual inquiries*, be received at once into full membership.

. . . The 'usual inquiries,' proposed to all candidates for full membership, may embrace the following: 'Have you read our Articles of Religion, and do you cordially subscribe to them? Especially do you believe in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ—that he has made an atonement for all mankind, and that men are justified by faith alone in him? and that it is the privilege and duty of all Christians to be made holy in this life, and to adorn the doctrine of God our

Saviour in all things? Do you now solemnly purpose to consecrate yourself to the service of Almighty God, and obediently keep his holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life? Have you read the rules and Discipline of our church, and will you endeavor to observe and keep them? Do you cherish kind and fraternal feelings toward the members of this church, and do you feel that it would be a special blessing to you to be associated with them in Christian fellowship and sacred covenant? Will you receive kindly the counsels, warnings, and reproofs of your brethren, and watch mutually over them for their Christian improvement? Will you contribute of your earthly substance, according to your ability, to the support of the gospel and the various institutions of the church?" " (*Italics in the text, Éd. 1855, pp. 23-28.*)

This definition of the "usual inquiries" is in quotation marks, showing that he is stating a formula long in use, although used privately by pastors prior to 1840, instead of publicly, before the church, as then became the rule. It will be seen that these "usual inquiries" cover everything that is in the question now used in paragraph 527, of the present Ritual, and *more*. If the church had been subjecting people to such searching inquiry as this, before receiving them

into full membership, even by private examination, there cannot be the slightest question as to the constitutionality of the form now in use by the church. These "usual inquiries" not only covered the questions as to believing in the doctrines, but also in the *experience* of the higher Christian life for which early Methodism stood so strongly. More people would probably now object to *these* questions than to those regarding belief in the Articles of Religion.

It will be observed also that again it is stated that people were only asked to promise to observe the rules of the church *when they were taken into full membership*. Evidently, in Bishop Baker's view, the "one condition" in paragraph 29 was not considered a part of the rules, and hence does not come under the Restrictive Rules. Further, since people could only be admitted without being put on trial if they came "from other *orthodox* churches," it follows that our church laid much emphasis on orthodoxy, and also this was a class of cases in which the "one condition" did not apply. Both of these facts are fatal to the contention of the Appeal.

Bishop Baker's discussion of the relation of probationers, or members on trial, is no less clear and decisive than that just considered. After showing clearly, how our probationary system corresponds exactly with the plan of the prim-



itive church, by quoting Origen, Bishop Stillingfleet, and Lord King, from whom Wesley took his pattern, he says: "It is the prerogative of the preacher alone to receive persons on trial. No one whose name is taken by a class-leader can be considered as a member on trial until the preacher recognizes the person as such. The *general qualifications* of those who join on trial are, 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.' This desire, however, must be evinced 'By doing no harm,' 'By instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with,' 'By running with patience the race set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily, submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world, and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them, falsely, for the Lord's sake,' and 'By attending upon all the ordinances of God.' As the minister may not know whether the candidate makes a truthful declaration of his moral state, he is authorized 'to admit none on trial except they are well recommended by one you know, or until they have met twice or thrice in class.' As they are not supposed, at the time of joining on trial, to be acquainted with our doctrines, usages, and discipline, they are not required at that time to subscribe to our Articles of Religion

and general economy; but if they propose to join in full connection, 'They must give satisfactory assurances both of the correctness of their faith, and their willingness to observe and keep the rules of the church.' A mere probationer enters into no covenant with the church. Every step he takes is *preliminary* to this, and either party may, at any time, quietly dissolve the relation between them without rupture or specific church labor. The Discipline does not specify the time when the probation shall terminate, but it has fixed the minimum period. 'Let none be received into the church until they are recommended by a leader with whom they have met *at least* six months.' "

' How could testimony be more direct? According to this eminent authority, instead of entrance into our church having been planned as a sort of "free-for-all," as the Appeal would have us think, through the open door of only "one condition," *and nothing more*, it is here shown that there were exceedingly strict requirements, as to moral and even Christian character, before people could even be *admitted on trial*, much less be admitted into full membership. Evidently, they were far more strict in these matters in the early days of our church than we have been in later years, even since the adoption of our present Ritual, of which complaint is made in the

Appeal. It will be noticed that in this statement the "one condition" is again spoken of as only a "general qualification" for reception on trial, instead of a *rule*. The books containing the testimony of the last two eminent authorities on the Discipline, were issued ten or fifteen years before 1864, when our Ritual was adopted.

To the same effect is the testimony of Henry Wheeler in his great work, *The History and Exposition of the XXV Articles*. He says: "Prior to 1864 candidates for full membership were examined by the pastor, and were required to give satisfactory assurances of the correctness of their faith and their willingness to observe and keep the rules and discipline of the church. The method of the examination was discretionary with the pastor, and the declaration of faith was general rather than specific" (p. 10).

Of course the fact that the examinations of candidates, prior to 1840, was private makes no difference at all so far as its bearing on the question at issue is concerned. If the "one condition" had been given the force which the Appeal gives it, private examination would be as much out of place as public. Attention is also called to the fact that this writer also says that allegiance to the discipline and rules of the church was only required when candidates were received into full membership. Evidently, the

“one condition,” as a prerequisite of admission *on trial* only was not considered one of the rules.

Bishop Stephen M. Merrill, the strongest of our later commentators on the Discipline, is no less explicit. In his *Digest of Methodist Law*, page 44, he says: “The second class of applicants for probation in the church may be regarded as seekers or inquirers; the conditions on which they are to be received are few and simple. There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies—‘a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.’ This is the only condition ‘*previously*’ required, and *this relates exclusively to admissions on trial*. Persons who have been converted are admitted on trial, in order that the genuineness of their experience may be tested, and that they may form an *acquaintance with the teachings and usages of the church*. . . . Those who do not profess conversion are admitted as seekers. They profess to be penitent. They ‘desire to flee from the wrath to come.’ . . . It is right, and in accordance with *Methodist usage from the beginning*, to urge penitents to become probationers in the church. . . . It is not lawful to admit any one into *full membership* who does not profess to be converted. There is no standard or model of experience to be insisted upon, except that each

one must be able to answer the question, 'Have you saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?' : . . . No one is to be received in any case without baptism, or without assenting to the doctrines of the church and promising obedience to the Discipline" (*italics ours*).

It will be readily seen that all these writers, the very best our church has ever produced, take the same view of what the practice of our church has been from the beginning as to the reception of members. *There are none to be found who bear opposite testimony*, for the facts on record would not sustain such testimony. Nobody can successfully dispute the fact that from the very beginning the "one condition" admitted to membership *on trial only*, while there were other requirements for admission into full membership. For the purposes of this discussion it is not of great importance *just what* those added requirements were, so long as they prove that they were *not* met by the "one condition."

Methodism has always had *degrees* of membership. There were more of these in the early religious societies of Wesley than there have been since the organization of our church. This continuous practice of the church from its inception, itself becomes the truest interpretation of the place and force of the "one condition" in Methodist polity, thus by a long series of

precedents establishing the law of the church on this question, proving conclusively that the present practice of the church is constitutional.

*Seventh: The Proof from the Articles of Religion*

The only writer of note who has undertaken to give a different interpretation than above indicated, to the practices of Methodism, is Abel Stevens, whose monumental historical work is justly very highly esteemed in the church. It is on his views that the Appeal evidently almost wholly bases its claims. Yet a careful study of even his words does not sustain the Appeal. On pages 448 and 449 of Vol. II of the edition of 1859 he makes the statements supposed to support the Appeal. "It is a noteworthy fact that, in providing for the organization of American Methodism, Wesley did not change the 'General Rules' as the basis of membership, though he prepared for it 'Articles of Religion.' This interesting historical fact is full of significance as an example of that distinction between indicatory and obligatory standards of theological belief which Methodism has, perhaps, had the honor of first exemplifying among the leading churches of the modern Christian world. The Articles of Religion and the General Rules are both parts of the constitutional law of American Methodism; but the General Rules still prescribe the 'only

condition' of membership, and mention not the Articles or any other dogmatic symbols."

No one holds Dr. Abel Stevens in higher esteem than does this writer, who counts it one of the great privileges of his life to have had a personal acquaintance with the great historian, having also sustained the relation of pastor to one of his children. But there are some inaccuracies in the above quotation, which, in the interest of truth, should be stated. Wesley did *not* give the General Rules to our church at the time of its organization. There is not a word about them in any of the documents he sent over at that time. In fact, they did not have any decisive action taken upon them until the General Conference of 1808, when the Restrictive Rules were adopted. They did not even appear in connection with the Minutes of the Conferences until 1789 (Sherman, p. 113; Emory, p. 180), five years after the organization of our church, and this was two years after Mr. Wesley's name had been dropped from the Minutes of the Conferences. Neither were the Articles of Religion inserted in the Minutes until about that same time, although it was seemingly understood that the Rules were in force, and that the Articles of Religion were our doctrinal standards. They were both formally inserted in the constitution at the same time, by the Gen-

eral Conference of 1808, which was seventeen years after Mr. Wesley's death. In the first address ever made to an American Conference by the newly elected bishops, Coke and Asbury, in 1789, they used the following language: "We wish to see this little publication [the Conference Minutes] in the house of every Methodist, and the more so as it contains our plan of collegiate and Christian education, and the Articles of Religion, maintained more or less, in part or in whole, by every reformed church in the world. . . . Far from wishing you to be ignorant of any of our doctrines, or any part of our Discipline, *we desire you to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the whole.* We know you are not, in general, able to purchase many books, but you ought, next to the Word of God, to procure the Articles and canons of the church to which you belong" (Emory, *History of the Discipline*, p. 89; italics ours). This does not sound much as though the first bishops of our church considered the Articles of Religion "indicatory" instead of "obligatory." This same Episcopal Address stood in the Discipline, with only slight changes, and with the approval of the General Conferences, until 1840, signed anew at each session by the men then in office as bishops.

When Dr. Stevens says that "the General Rules still prescribe the 'only condition' of mem-



bership," he is speaking very loosely, for they only, at that time, or any other, as has been abundantly shown in this chapter, "prescribed" the admission upon trial, and he does not anywhere say that it admitted to full membership. There was also a very good reason why the General Rules did not mention the Articles of Religion, and that is, because the Articles had not been framed for our church until fifty years after the General Rules had been given to the societies. It is also true, as previously shown, that added rules *were* adopted at the organization of our church, in respect to receiving members. A distinct action was taken by the "Christmas Conference" in adopting the Liturgy sent over by Wesley, as shown in the Minutes of the Conference. This Liturgy provided for administration of the sacraments; and that of baptism, with its confession of the Apostles' Creed, was considered a form of receiving people into full membership. These very Ritual forms were inserted in the Discipline of 1808, at which time the Restrictive Rules were adopted, and the General Rules and the Articles of Religion were first formally made a part of the constitution of the church.

Let it also again be noted that in the Discipline of 1808 the heading, "The General Rules," did not stand, as now, above the title of Wesley's

historic document. The title was given as Wesley wrote it: "The Nature, Design, *and* General Rules," etc. Evidently, the General Conference which adopted the Restrictive Rules at the same time that it put the General Rules into the constitution, did not consider the *whole* of Wesley's document as consisting of the General Rules, and there is good ground for doubting whether paragraph 29 was so included, as before shown. However, the most significant thing in Dr. Stevens's reference to the subject is contained in the footnotes to the part quoted above, and others following. He says: "But it has sometimes been questioned whether doctrinal opinions are not required for *admission* by the administrative prescription adopted since Wesley's day: '*Let none be received until they shall, on examination by the minister in charge, before the church, give satisfactory assurance both of the correctness of their faith and their willingness to keep the rules*' (italics in text). It may be replied: 1. That, according to Wesley's definition above, of the faith essential to a true church, there could be no difficulty here. 2. That, as the requisition is merely an administrative one for the preachers, and prescribes not what are to be 'satisfactory assurances,' etc., the latter are evidently left to the discretion of the pastor, and the requirement is designed to afford him the

opportunity of further instructing the candidate, or of receiving from him pledges that his opinions shall not become a practical abuse in the society. 3. If the rule amounts to more than this, it would probably be pronounced, by good judges of Methodist law, incompatible with the usages and general system of Methodism, an oversight of the General Conference which enacted it, and contrary to the General Rules, as guarded by the Restrictive Rules.”

It is evident that the Appeal bases its conclusions upon the reasoning as set forth in section 3, of the above quotation. Now it is a singular fact, as shown in this chapter, that *none* of the “good judges of Methodist law,” whose writings on the Discipline have thus far become standard in the church, agree with this position of Dr. Stevens. It is also a curious fact that the reasoning in the first two sections of the quotation nullifies the conclusions stated in the third. It is noticeable that these two sections, the first and second, are never quoted by the supporters of the Appeal, but only the conclusions in the third. In the section numbered “1” Dr. Stevens admits that “according to Wesley’s definition of the faith essential to a true church there could be no difficulty here.” That is, the form of receiving members into full connection by examining them as to their faith beforehand, would

not be prohibited by paragraph 29 if we keep in mind "Wesley's idea of the faith essential to a true church." Well, what then, *was* Wesley's idea of such a faith? He constantly reiterated the declaration that his societies were *not* a church, nor intended to be. The only "true church" which Wesley had anything to do with the founding of, in this country, was the Methodist Episcopal Church, and for that church he prescribed an extensive creed, as set forth in our Articles of Religion. This instance is the only one we have as a means of knowing what was "Wesley's definition of the faith essential to a true church."

Then, again, Dr. Stevens seems to overlook the important fact that Wesley had, to use Dr. Stevens's own words, only an "indicatory" and not an "obligatory" relation to the organization of our church. He could only *recommend* as to either the creed, the Liturgy, or the Discipline adopted. The American Methodists were a pretty independent set of people, as has been previously shown. They did their own deciding as to what they wanted in their church. They did not accept all of Wesley's recommendations, by any means, any more than they did his "Calm Appeal" regarding the Revolutionary War.

In his section numbered "2" Dr. Stevens

admits all that those who oppose the Appeal contend for. He says that "As the requisition [as to examination of candidates] is merely an *administrative* measure, and prescribes not what are to be 'satisfactory assurances,' etc., the latter are evidently left to the discretion of the pastor." He implies that going *that* far would *not* be an infraction of the "one condition." Yet it is a great deal more than is included in the "one condition." If the "one condition" can properly permit this much, it could just as properly permit all that the church now practices, for nobody claims that even the present practice is anything more than an "administrative measure." It has never been regarded as something necessary to salvation, but only as a proper rite of admission to full membership, which is purely an "administrative matter."

But the most decisive proof of all on this constitutional question seems to have been entirely missed both by Dr. Stevens and by the Appeal and its supporters. It is that contained in Article XXII, of the Articles of Religion. This is on "The Rites and Ceremonies of Churches," according to the title. In part, it says: "It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same or exactly alike; for they have always been different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries,

times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. . . *Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification.*" In the original Article in the Church of England, the last clause had the phrase, "Every particular or *national* church may ordain," etc., instead of "every particular church," as it stands in our creed. This was changed by Wesley and the founders of our church to make the Article accord with the character of the church.

Also instead of "rites and ceremonies" the original in the Thirty-nine Articles had "*traditions* and ceremonies." There were several other minor changes also, so that it is clear Wesley took pains to carefully adapt the language of the Article to the peculiar needs of the new Church of Methodism.

This Article was designed to have supreme authority over all matters connected with forms of worship, manners of administering sacraments, forms of ordination, methods of receiving members, etc. It had this position in the polity of the Church of England, with which Wesley was so familiar and from which he took it. Wheeler, in his History of the XXV Articles, speaking of the origin of Article XXII, the one under discussion, says: "The aim of the Article

was the regulation of the internal discipline and usages of the Church [of England] which had been the subject of vehement disputation in the reign of Edward VI" (p. 357). He goes on to say, page 361: "It has been regarded by wise and good men as providential that no trace can be found in the apostolic church of any prescribed mode of church government to the exclusion of all others; or of a creed or catechism or Liturgy upon which superstition could seize as an invariable rule of faith and practice." A little further on he adds: "Now, the general church consists of many branches or denominations; aggregations of churches which hold the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, but have different forms of church government, and a variety of rites and ceremonies. Rules and regulations for church government must be established, and an order of public worship must be provided.

"The power to do this in the Methodist Episcopal Church is lodged with the General Conference, and is exercised under certain constitutional limitations. The church has also power to enforce observance of the rites and ceremonies it may adopt. The candidates for admission to membership are asked, 'Will you cheerfully be governed by the rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and hold sacred the

ordinances of God?' The answer must be affirmative. Thus every person who unites with the church enters into a solemn covenant with the church as a whole. He adopts the Articles of Religion, assents to the Discipline, and to its rites and ceremonies, so long as they are not repugnant to the Word of God. He may at any time sever the connection, but may not inveigh against her doctrines or discipline" (p. 362).

"The church, by her authorized agent, has prepared an order of public worship, and proper forms for the administration of the sacraments, burial of the dead, the reception of members on probation and into full membership, and other public services. All of these should be observed in the spirit and in the letter, by ministers and members. Most of these *rites and ceremonies* are administered by the ministry, who should follow with care the prescribed forms, without additions or omissions, except in things made discretionary with them" (pp. 362, 363).

Bear in mind that the author is here explaining the meaning and application of *Article XXII*, not the General Rules. The fact is that by the provisions of the constitution of our church *the General Rules are entirely subject to the authority of Article XXII*, because this Article is the *only* part of the constitution which distinctly confers upon the church the authority



to enact or adopt such administrative measures of church government as it may wish, and empowers it to change them at will, only so that they may conduce to "edification." That is the only limit placed upon the exercise of this power. This includes the stipulation that they must not be "repugnant to the Word of God."

Even if the "one condition" in paragraph 29 were a part of the General Rules, which this Argument denies, it would still be subordinate to the authority of Article XXII. It is very significant that this Article covers the very things in the church in which Wesley distinctly stated he allowed the liberty of "opinion" for which the Appeal and its supporters contend, as was clearly set forth in the second section of this Argument. Quotations were there given from his sermon on "The Catholic Spirit," written expressly to define his liberalism as to "opinions," which proved conclusively that his liberality was only in the field of modes of worship, administration of sacraments, church government, etc. Yet the Appeal is now trying to convince the church that right in this particular field he was *most illiberal*; to such a degree that he deliberately undertook to confine the freedom of the greatest church which sprang from his movement, in the important matter of how it should receive communicants, to the

loose, inaccurate, crude, and uncertain method by which he gathered a few stumbling souls under his spiritual guidance when he had not the remotest thought of founding a church. The proposition, in the light of the indisputable facts here presented, is entirely unthinkable. Wesley, at least, was consistent with himself. Instead of trying to tie up the church to an ancient precedent, of more or less doubtful meaning, and difficult application even in his societies, as he constantly found, and which his records show, he provided the church with a charter which guaranteed it the right to "ordain, change, or abolish" forms and methods of administration of discipline or worship as it might find necessary or wise. No one saw more clearly than did he the vast difference between his loosely organized religious societies for spiritual culture, formed *within* an already developed and equipped national church, and an independent, newly organized church, planning the conquest of a vast, new continent, not as a state church, but by voluntary accessions.

Besides all this, the church has continued to give, from the first, the very force and position to the "one condition" which Wesley gave it even in his simple societies. We have clearly shown that it *never*, even then, admitted to anything but membership *on trial*. It still does that.

The only thing which the church has done, additional to what Wesley formerly did in his societies, is, under his own advice and recommendation, to make admission into full membership a more serious matter. And the reason is perfectly plain. The members of Wesley's societies were already supposed to be members of regularly established churches, *besides* being members of the societies. With us it is a totally different thing. We are building a church of world dimensions, with need of everything which can dignify it, and make membership in it stand for something impressive and inspiring, to be entered into thoughtfully and prayerfully. Wesley, in his far-sightedness, saw all this, and made provision for it in the plan of organization which he painstakingly drafted, and submitted for the ratification of the American Methodists. For nothing do we owe him a greater debt.

All the points at issue in this discussion are covered by the wise provision Wesley made in Article XXII, for the future church, which has far outgrown even his prophetic vision. This Article supersedes all that had gone before it, and is the final authority upon all matters relating to forms of administration in the church, and the liberty guaranteed by it is absolute.

The very first paragraph of the Restrictive Rules expressly safeguards the Articles of Re-

ligion from alteration or change, indicating, by placing this first on the list, that the General Conference of 1808 considered this the thing of foremost importance to the future of the church. Then in 1832 the General Conference made the Articles of Religion the *one* part of our constitution entirely exempt from change or alteration, thus indicating that the importance of these Articles had been increasing in the mind of the church since the Restrictive Rules were adopted in 1808. This exemption applies not only to the doctrinal Articles, but also to those which are only administrative, which means that the freedom of action guaranteed in Article XXII shall be perpetual. It means also that the Restrictive Rules themselves are subject to the authority of this Article, because they operate only under its permission. These Articles were the first thing put into the formal constitution of our church, and the authority of a constitutional law which *permits* the making of a rule of discipline, must be higher than that of the rule made under it. In order to break the force of this reasoning it would have to be proven that the enactment, by the General Conference of 1808, of the fourth Restrictive Rule, forbidding the General Conference to "revoke or change the General Rules of the United Societies," expressed and *exhausted* the entire authority of Article XXII, as

to forms of Ritual or Discipline for receiving people from membership on trial into full membership. In other words, it would have to be clearly proven that the General Conference of 1808 not only meant to include paragraph 29, with its "one condition *previously* required" before people were considered eligible to membership, as one of the General Rules under which they were to come *after* being admitted to membership, which this Argument stoutly disputes; but that the General Conference also meant to give paragraph 29 absolute authority over methods of receiving people into *full* membership as well as upon trial. It is needless to say that this writer does not believe such a showing of proof can be successfully made, for reasons already fully given in this Argument.

The fact is, there is not, so far as this writer has been able to discover, a single thing on record to prove that this General Conference, or any other, ever considered paragraph 29 as applying to anything else but to admission on trial, just as certainly was the case in the early societies.

The Discipline of 1808, in which the Restrictive Rules first appear, carries also the Episcopal Address of Bishops Asbury and McKendree, with these significant passages: "We most earnestly recommend to you, as members of our

church, our **FORM OF DISCIPLINE** [capitals in text] which has been founded on the experience of a long series of years; as also on the observations and remarks we have made on ancient and modern churches. We wish to see this little publication in the house of every Methodist, and the more so, as it contains our plan of Christian education, and the Articles of Religion maintained, more or less, in whole or in part, by every reformed church in the world. . . . You ought, next to the Word of God, to procure the Articles and canons of the church to which you belong" (p. 4). In proof that the General Conference was in sympathy with these official utterances, which also exhorted the Methodist people to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the whole of our doctrines and discipline," it placed the Articles of Religion, including Article XXII, in the very first section of the Discipline of that year, which was the first effort at framing a formal constitution; made them the first thing to be safeguarded by the Restrictive Rules; retained John Wesley's title, "The Nature, Design, *and* General Rules of the United Societies," instead of applying the term "The General Rules" to the whole document; inserted the question, page 51, "How shall we prevent improper persons from insinuating themselves into the society?" and

answered that none were to be received in full membership until they had been recommended by a leader with whom they had met at least six months on trial; none were to be received on trial without the recommendation of somebody well known, or had met several times in class (which the "one condition" permitted without their joining at all); and the rules were to be read to them the first time they met, so that they would know under what regulations they would come *after* joining. It also inserted the ritual of baptism, to be used before people were received from trial into full membership, which included assent to the Apostles' Creed; included a section on "Privileges Granted to Serious Persons Who are not Members of our Society," which permitted them to attend every alternate meeting *without* joining, for a few times; ordered members who had married "unawakened" persons put back on trial, even in doubtful cases; refused admission to full membership to "any who wear high heads, enormous bonnets, ruffles, or rings"; made neglect of attendance at class meeting a cause of exclusion from membership; reinserted the rules for the Band-Societies; ordered that the children be put upon the course of instruction and catechism provided by the church, because they were considered members on trial if they had been baptized in infancy; and

directed that they be admitted into society “if any of them be truly awakened”; *all* of these things having a bearing on the matter of church membership, *yet none of them covered by the “one condition” contained in paragraph 29.* Besides this, there were about one hundred pages devoted to the standard doctrines of Methodism, or almost one-half of the entire Discipline, showing how earnest that General Conference was to thoroughly indoctrinate the Methodist people.

How, in the face of all these records, which anybody can verify by referring to the Discipline of 1808, can it for a moment be claimed that the General Conference of that year, which enacted the Restrictive Rules, made the fourth Restrictive Rule to express and *exhaust* all the authority of Article XXII regarding rules of receiving church members, and confining those methods to the simple form contained in the “one condition” of paragraph 29? It is utterly inconceivable! Yet until it is proven that the General Conference did that impossible thing, the Appeal has no real foundation, in view of the authority given the church, in Article XXII, affecting these questions.



## IV

### ARGUMENT OF HARVEY HENDERSON

AS MADE IN THE GENERAL CONFERENCE  
OF 1920

THIS case involves the constitutionality of all the legislation heretofore passed, and now in force, relating to the condition and qualifications for membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church. It comes before the General Conference sitting in its capacity as the Supreme Court of the church; and the Conference, not the Committee on Judiciary, is now to consider and determine the question of constitutionality which is raised by the report. If the Conference follows the opinion delivered by the majority of the committee in its report, all of the legislation above mentioned will be rendered null and void; and there will be practically nothing to prevent a designing person of any belief, or no belief, from intruding himself into the church.

We are all agreed that in considering this question we are to be governed by the constitution of the church; but before we deliver our judgment by a vote of the General Conference, we must know what the constitution prescribes.

The majority of the Committee on Judiciary, as I affirm, have fallen into error in the conclusion they have submitted in their report, which it is my task now to undertake to show to the members of the General Conference.

In the introductory part of the document written by John Wesley in the year 1743, for the government of his religious societies, which he called the General Rules of the United Societies, is found this statement: "There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins."

These General Rules were distributed widely among the Methodists in Great Britain and in America, and formed the law under which Wesley governed the societies. Wesley's government was personal and autocratic; the societies themselves not having any part either in forming rules for their government or in executing them.

After the independence of the American colonies was established by the revolutionary war, it became evident to the members of the societies in this country, and to John Wesley himself, that the time had come to create an independent church, including the persons who belonged to these societies in America. This was done with the advice and assistance of Wesley himself, who prepared the articles of religion for

the new church and also a Liturgy. A General Conference was held at Baltimore in December, 1784, which created a new and self-governing religious organization which was named the Methodist Episcopal Church. The governing body of this church is in session here to-day. In the beginning the General Conference held supreme and unrestricted power. The new church was entirely separated from the United Societies and from the control of John Wesley. The General Rules of the United Societies had no binding force in this church, except what the General Conference saw fit to give them by its own action; but the General Conference adopted them as a part of the law of the church.

The General Conference of 1784, after having established the Methodist Episcopal Church, proceeded at once to make rules and regulations for its government. One of the fundamental rights of every organization of this kind is to prescribe the terms and qualifications for membership, and to order the method by which members shall be received.

The business of the General Conference of 1784, which constituted the church, was transacted by questions and answers. Its minutes, published in 1785, which contain the only written or printed constitution of the new church, show that eighty-one questions were

asked and answered. One of the first matters taken up was that relating to the admission of members into the church. Question No. 16 was this: "How shall we prevent improper persons from insinuating themselves into the society?" The form of this question indicates plainly that the members of the Conference were not satisfied that the provision in the General Rules relating to memberships would meet the requirements of the new church; and that they thought it proper to establish a different plan. This no doubt arose from the long experience they had had administering the General Rules in the societies prior to this time. The answer to the question as appears by the Discipline of 1785 is, "Let none be received into the church until they are recommended by a leader with whom they have met at least two months on trial."<sup>1</sup>

Consider carefully the provisions of this law, and note, first, that none are to be received into the church until certain things have been complied with; then note what these things are. They are to be connected with the church at least two months; they are to be on trial during these two months; that is, they are to be under observation, investigation as to their habits, beliefs, and character. They are to be under the

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<sup>1</sup>The exact words in the Discipline are "Give Tickets to none till they are recommended by a Leader, with whom they have met at least two Months on Trial."—BOOK EDITOR.

supervision of an officer called a leader, with whom they are to meet from time to time, and at the expiration of two months, if the leader recommends them as proper persons to be admitted into the church, they are to be received into membership.

It will be seen at once that this law provided a new and entirely different method for receiving members into the church from that which was set forth in Wesley's General Rules. It not only provided different conditions, but introduced a different principle for dealing with candidates for membership. Another thing also appears at a glance to those who are at all familiar with the Discipline of our church, namely, that the fundamental principles set forth in this law governing admission into membership, are the same which have prevailed in the Methodist Episcopal Church from that day until the present; and out of this plan have come by a process of development, all the rules and regulations now in force in our church respecting this subject.

Now, allow me to call the attention of the members of the Conference to this matter of fact and also of law, that the new legislation enacted for the church concerning this matter was the complete and sufficient law of the church for the purpose named, that it was a complete

substitute for the only condition statement contained in the General Rules. And it having been enacted by the supreme authority of the church to cover the whole subject in question, it repealed by necessary implication whatever there was of law in the statement that there is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." Having been entirely repealed in this way, that rule has never had any binding force in the Methodist Episcopal Church from December, 1784, until this day.

This is the determining fact in the present case. Let this become entirely clear to your mind. And you will also take note of another thing, namely, that the majority of the committee, as shown by their report, have overlooked or ignored this controlling feature of the case, which is the evident cause of their falling into error.

We must notice another answer given to question No. 16 just mentioned, which was this: "No person holding slaves shall in future be admitted into society or to the Lord's Supper until he previously complies with these rules concerning slavery." This is also a new condition, and throws additional light on the fact that the General Conference which organized

the church set Wesley's rule entirely aside, and substituted a different system for the admission of members.

The General Conference of the year 1789 enacted that none should be admitted into the church except after six months on trial, by which the term of probation was extended from two months to six.

The rule against slavery having been suspended, it was reenacted in the year 1796, as follows: "No slaveholder shall be received into the society until the preacher who has the oversight of the circuit has spoken to him freely and faithfully on the subject of slavery."

We are to bear the fact in mind as we proceed that the General Conference of the young church had supreme and unrestricted power, so that no question can be raised, in any way whatever, as to the constitutionality of the legal provisions we have just mentioned; and the General Conference continued to have unrestricted power until the delegated General Conference was established in 1808 to meet in 1812, subject to the "Restrictive Rules."

The foregoing was the law of the Methodist Episcopal Church governing the reception of members, enacted by the supreme law-making body of the church, from 1784 to 1812, a period of twenty-eight years. During this time the laws,

customs, and usages of the church had become well settled and established, and there was no question whatever about what these laws and usages were, and no claim that John Wesley's "one-condition" rule had any bearing on the subject of admission to membership, or had any force whatever in the church.

The fourth Restrictive Rule, which limited the power of the General Conference from 1812 onward, provided that the General Conference shall not revoke nor change the General Rules of the United Societies. But, as we have just seen, that one of the General Rules we are now considering had already been not only changed, but repealed and superseded by the supreme and unrestricted General Conference, and had so continued to be for twenty-eight years when the delegated General Conference began its operation. The restrictive rule had no power whatever to affect the legislation that was already in force in 1812; neither did it have any power to restore to life John Wesley's defunct rules respecting membership. It follows, therefore, as a matter of law, that the Restrictive Rules have no proper place in the consideration of the question now before us.

Let us now proceed to consider the course of legislation by the General Conference from 1812 to the present. In doing this no evidence what-



ever will appear that during this length of time Wesley's rule about membership was regarded as being in force in the church.

In 1836 the General Conference enacted that none should be admitted to membership except such as are well recommended, or had met twice or thrice in class; and they were also required to be baptized.

In 1840 candidates for membership were required to be examined by the ministers in charge before the church, as to their doctrinal beliefs and their willingness to keep the rules of the church.

In 1856 baptized children enrolled as probationers were to be received into the church on recommendation of the class leaders, after six months' probation, by publicly assenting to the baptismal covenant, and the questions on doctrines and rules.

In 1864 candidates for membership baptized in infancy were required to assent before the church to the baptismal covenant. Also, in that year, the Ritual for the reception of members was adopted, which continued without change until 1916, when it was amended.

In 1872 the General Conference provided as follows: "In order to prevent improper persons from insinuating themselves into the church, let no one be received until such person has been at

least six months on trial, and has been recommended by the leaders and stewards meeting . . . and has been baptized; and who shall on examination by the minister in charge before the church, give satisfactory assurances both on the correctness of his faith and his willingness to observe and keep the rules of the church.”

This was the year in which laymen for the first time took their seats in the General Conference; and the attention of the entire church during four years or more prior to that date had been directed intently and continuously upon questions relating to the constitution of the church.

It will appear plainly to all who will consider the question, that the General Conference has consistently and continuously adhered to the principles established by the organizing Conference of 1784 down to the present time. During the first twenty-eight years of this *period* the General Conference was supreme and unrestricted, and no question can be raised as to the constitutionality of its enactments; and since the year 1812 the General Conference has simply followed the course laid down in 1784.

We are also to notice the important fact that in reviewing the legal history of the church, we obtain the contemporary construction placed by the men of those times upon the constitution,

the legislation of the church, and upon Wesley's General Rules. This contemporary construction is entitled to great weight, and it is contrary to that arrived at by the majority of the Judiciary Committee in this case.

The revision of the Constitution in 1901, containing the General Rules, did not operate to change the law of the church, or to give new life to Wesley's dead rule respecting membership. The church had no intention whatever to do that.

The General Conference has acted in all its legislation respecting this matter in good faith, and in the belief that its enactments have been constitutional. It is, moreover, the legal presumption that these enactments are, in fact, conformable to the constitution of the church.

After the lapse of a period of one hundred and thirty-six years, and in view of the legal presumption, and the long established customs which have arisen, it would be highly improper to overthrow the legislation on this subject, which has been supported by a long line of the ablest judicial minds the church has produced.

(I refer for my authority respecting the action of the General Conference in the matter set forth above, to Sherman's History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, published by The Book Concern. 1874.)

